

*Just
Mary*



*by
Effie M. Williams*

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Chapter I

Mother Harmon glanced at the postmark on the letter which the delivery man left in her mail box, and then hastily breaking the seal, she drew a few sheets of folded paper from the envelope and began to read: My Own Dear Mother:

How awful it is for me to try to write to you this morning, and I know that you will scold me for so doing, but I just had to write to you so that your anxiety will be relieved, for I know that you have been very anxious for the past few days. I can now tell you that it is all over, and we have a lovely little daughter which was born yesterday afternoon. It seems remarkable to me that my firstborn should be born a Thursday afternoon and be a girl the same as yours was, but I am so glad that my baby girl and myself have the same day of the week in which we came into this world, although it could not be the same day of the month. She surely is a darling, and I wonder if your feelings were akin to mine when you looked on your firstborn for the first time and heard my cry. I cannot tell you the feeling of motherly love which I had when I heard the cry of my baby, and it seems that I just can't keep my eyes off the little basket where nurse has her all wrapped up in blankets. And Dan is just as foolish as I am about her. He could not sleep last night, and every little move that was made, he was up to see if he could not do something. Nurse laughed at him and told

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him he would soon be accustomed to a baby's cry and could sleep if two were crying at once. But he is a proud father, and I cannot find words to express what kind of a mother I am. But as I look at my baby, my love for you deepens, Mother, dear, for I know now what it means to be a mother. When we decided on a name we thought of you and of Mother Dennison, and could decide on no better name than the name you both have, so we call her Mary. Just Mary. We thought there was no other name to go with it that is suited to our baby since she has the name of both of her grandmothers, so she is just Mary Dennison.

Then followed in the letter many things which were meant only for the mother to know, and then an inquiry into the health of both herself and Father Harmon, and the letter was signed, "Your loving daughter, Elsie."

Tears were streaming down the cheeks of Mother Harmon as she reached the porch where she paused long enough to fold the letter together and place it in the envelope again, then passing through the house she donned a big sun bonnet and with letter in hand started down the lane toward the field where a man and two boys were plowing.

"Elsie's baby is a girl," said she as she lifted the letter in her hand and then handed it to Father Harmon, "and they have named her Mary."

Father Harmon backed himself between the plow handles, and drawing the letter from the envelope, as his wife had done before him, began to peruse the pages. The contents of the letter stirred his emotions for he first smiled as he read of the new baby and how proud she was of it, but soon his expression changed as he came to the closing of the letter, and tears fell from his eyes as they had from the eyes of Mother Harmon.

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Folding the letter, he placed it in the envelope, handed it back to Mother Harmon, and said, “Well, I am glad. And I was almost sure that they would name her Mary should the baby be a girl, but isn’t it strange that it is just Mary? I think I could have found a name to go with it. Ann, Jane, Elizabeth, Lou, or Susan—any of them would sound good with Mary, and they could have called her by both names.”

“Yes, I think they sound all right myself,” said Mother Harmon, “but I guess they wanted it to be just Mary, and I think that is all right. But would you not like to see the little thing? I can almost see it, for I am sure that Mary is just like Elsie was when she was born, with a little round face and a head of hair as black as a crow.”

At this time the two boys came to the end of the furrow they were plowing, wrapped the lines around the plow handles, and came to where Father and Mother Harmon were, only to hear the same as Father Harmon had heard, for as soon as they came near enough for Mother Harmon to make them hear her call she said, “Elsie has a little girl baby.”

“Yes,” said Father Harmon, “you are Uncle Roy and Uncle Dave now, and you have a little niece whose name is Mary.”

“Huh,” said the younger of the two, who was Roy, “I don’t see why it couldn’t have been a boy.”

“The principal reason why it could not be a boy is because it is a girl,” laughingly replied Father Harmon, “and I think that is reason enough; don’t you?”

Roy had no reply to make, but Dave said, “I do not know as it makes much difference to me which it is, but it seems like I am getting old, to be called Uncle Dave.” “You can’t expect her to call

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you Uncle Dave for a few days yet,” retorted Roy in a disgusted tone of voice as he turned to go back to his plow.

“He acts like he is not pleased, but I dare say he is as proud as the rest of us,” said Mother Harmon as she watched her youngest son walk across the field to his team that was standing with head down and with closed eyes seemingly enjoying the few minutes’ rest which had been given them.

“Why, yes,” replied Father Harmon; “he is just at the age when he tries to make us believe that he does not care anything about the girls, but I dare say when Elsie comes home with the baby that he will be the most foolish of any of us, and will forget all about saying that he did not see why it couldn’t have been a boy.”

Mother Harmon returned to the house, and the men returned to their work in the field. As she walked along the lane which led from the field to the house, she recalled many incidents in the past. When she reached the house she sat down in the big rocker in the kitchen, and with a far-off look in her eyes, lived over the past. She saw herself a little girl with braided hair carrying the little dinner pail to the country schoolhouse, and the many interesting happenings of her early school life. In all her school life she had been the girl of the man she had married, and as she sat in that old rocker recalling many incidents of the past she would smile and then sigh and then smile again. Many years had passed, but she had not forgotten the many little dainties that had been given her by her schoolboy lover. A flush spread over her face as she recalled the first valentine she had ever received. It was one of those lovely, lacy valentines with two hearts pierced through with an arrow, and a little boy holding an envelope in his hand containing the verse, “As sure as the stars in heaven shine, I want you for my

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Valentine.” And with the valentine was a note from her schoolboy lover which read, “Mary, I really do want you.” The valentine had been wrapped nicely; and the evening of February 14, as Mary was leaving the schoolroom at the close of that day’s school, this package was placed in her hand. Glancing at the writing on the outside the wrapping she read, “To Mary Colton from Oliver Harmon.” She did not unwrap it until she had reached her own room at home, and when she did so it was with a heart that beat a rat-a-tat-tat. How well she remembered it and remembered also that although she had not chosen Oliver from any of the rest of her schoolboy friends and classmates, the valentine settled the question with her! From that time forward Oliver Harmon was Mary Colton’s favorite among them all.

Mother Harmon kept rocking and recalling many incidents, and her mind went back to the time when she first entertained him in her home as her beau. She was then seventeen; and he twenty. They were together at an apple-peeling given in the neighborhood, and he had walked home with her and then asked if he might call to see her the following Sunday afternoon. This memory brought a pleasant smile to Mother Harmon’s face as she saw herself in calico dress and white apron entertaining her first gentleman friend. This was in the month of October; from that time on Oliver Harmon was seen at the Colton home each Sunday afternoon. When Christmas time drew near, he was invited to eat Christmas dinner with the Colton family, an invitation which he accepted. Mother Colton had the reputation of being the best cook in all the country; Oliver prepared himself to eat plenty of her dinner by not eating any breakfast at all, but when the call was made for dinner and he was placed beside Mary at the table, although it was spread with many tempting dishes such as a big turkey with plenty of dressing, baked sweet potatoes, baked apples, cranberry sauce,

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pumpkin pie, and many other toothsome dainties, it seemed his appetite had left him and he could eat but very little; and Mary did not take anything on her plate at all. How well Mother Harmon remembered this and smiled again as she rocked to and fro in the big rocker!

For three years Oliver Harmon was a weekly visitor at the Colton home. Then came the wedding, which took place on Easter Sunday, and he brought his bride to the little log house which he had built on the place on which they were now living which was then a wooded tract of land, a part of the Harmon homestead, which was given to Oliver by his father.

How they labored together to get some cleared that they might farm some that year! Mary was by Oliver's side in all that he did, for she had been reared on the farm and was well acquainted with all kinds of hard labor. The third year passed and Mary and Oliver had cleared several acres of their land but left a small wooded tract for pasture for their cows. They were very prosperous; and each year marked a financial gain for them. The third year of their life together Elsie was born, and when she was a small baby just beginning to toddle about these two were awakened to their spiritual need through the illness of their only child. Elsie was very ill her second summer, and her life was despaired of. When the two saw their darling wasting away to a mere skeleton and lying almost lifeless before them they knelt by her little crib and each promised God if he would but spare her to them they would serve him and endeavor to rear the child in the way that would please God. The child was spared, and they did not forget the vow made, each giving his heart to God. From infancy, Elsie remembered the family altar where Father Harmon called the family together, reading from the Word of God, and then kneeling to ask God's

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blessings upon him and his. When Elsie was four years of age another daughter was born to them, only to stay with them a few short hours. Three years later David was born; and then three and one half years later Roy was born to them. The years had dealt pleasantly with them, and instead of the old log house where Oliver Harmon first brought his bride there was a large new frame house and Oliver Harmon was considered a prosperous farmer. How happy they were together! But it was not to last, for grown birds do not want to stay always in the nest that has been prepared for them but desire to find a nest of their own, and that was the way in the Harmon home.

When Elsie was in her eighteenth year Dan Dennison came into the country, hiring to a farmer who lived near the Harmon family, and it was only a short time until a warm friendship sprang up between him and Elsie. Dan remained in the community until the farming season was over and the corn all gathered, and then he returned to his own home which was in an adjoining state. He came back the following summer to work for the same farmer. That fall when he went to his own home he took with him Elsie Harmon to help him in building a home of their own.

Elsie had never been away from her home but a few days until her marriage, but she went to the home of her husband with a promise from him that she could visit her parents twice each year. This she had done until she had informed them that she could not come for her usual visit that year. How anxious the mother felt until the letter which she had that day received broke the much desired news to her that her daughter was all right!

As these thoughts flitted through Mother Harmon's mind she rested her head on the back of the rocker in which she was sitting, looked up and said, "Lord, I thank thee for all thy goodness to me

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these many years.” Then again glancing at the letter which lay in her lap, she slipped to her knees before the old rocking chair and with her face buried in her apron and tears falling like rain from her eyes, she poured out her heart to God, thanking him for his goodness to her and for his protection to her firstborn, asking him to keep his hand on mother and child. The assurance that God had heard her petition came to her soul, and she arose, placed the letter with some others which she had received from her daughter in a box in the old bureau drawer, and began to busy herself to prepare the noonday meal.

Chapter II

Summer advanced and August arrived with its scorching heat, and again the rural delivery man left another letter in the Harmon mail box. Mother Harmon hastily broke the seal; as she began to read she gave a cry of delight which did not escape the ears of Father Harmon, who was passing through the barn lot.

“What is up now?” inquired he, as he paused near the gate which led into the lane.

Waving the letter in her hand, Mother Harmon called out, “Another letter from Elsie, and she says she is coming home for a few weeks and wants someone to meet her at Whitefield Saturday afternoon.” All the time that Mother Harmon was talking she was walking toward her husband, and when she reached the gate she handed him the letter that he might read it for himself.

True enough, Elsie was coming home again, bringing little Mary that the grandparents might see what to her was the most wonderful baby on earth. Ever since Mary had come into the Dennison home, Elsie’s letters had been full of what a wonderful baby she had. This would always be the source of much amusement on the part of her father and mother, for they expected nothing else, but occasionally David and Roy would say, “Why can’t she tell us something else besides, ‘Baby, baby’ all the time? She seldom says a word about Dan any more. You would not think

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there is anyone else in all the world but that baby after reading one of her letters.”

“Just wait until you boys see her baby and you may not wonder at her writing so much about it,” replied Father Harmon. “I am guessing that each of you will think the same.”

“Not I,” retorted Roy. “I do not think girl babies are so wonderful. I do not see why it could not have been a boy anyhow.”

At this Father Harmon laughed and, turning to David, said, “How about you, son, do you think that you will have to turn against Elsie’s baby because it is a girl?”

David looked at first his father and then his mother and noted their expectant look. “I do not think that I shall turn against it, but I have never seen a baby yet that seemed so wonderful to me,” he said and turned away.

Such were conditions in the Harmon home when Elsie announced she would be with them for a few weeks. When Saturday morning dawned all was hustle and bustle about the place for the work for that day must be done, and as it would take some time to go to Whitefield and return there could be no time lost. When the hour for leaving arrived, Father and Mother Harmon found two boys eager to go along. When asked why they wanted to go so badly the reply was it had been more than a year since they had seen Elsie. It took some time to persuade them to remain at home, but when Father Harmon told Roy that he might go along if he would hold Elsie’s baby on his lap on the return home that settled the question, and he was willing to remain at home. So Father and Mother Harmon climbed into the carriage, leaving the boys at home to attend to some chores which must be done.

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As the Harmons lived some distance from Whitefield, and as this was before the days of the automobile, the bus, and other means of fast travel, with their slow farm team and carriage it would be late before they could return. As evening approached the boys did up the evening's chores. Fully one hour and a half before they could expect them to return, a fire was built in the kitchen stove, ready for Mother Harmon to prepare the evening meal. As the sun began to sink below the western horizon two boys sat on the gatepost with their faces turned toward Whitefield watching for the approach of the team, whose gait could not be mistaken. A cloud of dust would be sighted in the distance and the boys would wait anxiously until the top of the hill was reached ready to recognize the team and carriage which was bringing Elsie home. A number of carriages passed by and at last another was sighted in the distance amid a cloud of dust. As it reached the top of the hill, both boys exclaimed, "That is old Baldy and Fan," and ran to open the gate which led into the barn lot.

"Hello, David; hello, Roy," said Elsie as the carriage passed through the gate. Each boy returned the greeting with a boyish grin, and as the carriage stopped, Elsie handed a little bundle of white to Mother Harmon and sprang from the carriage. Soon she had each of the boys in her arms, hugging them one at a time and then both together. "My, my," she exclaimed, "what big brothers I have! Roy, you will soon be as big as Papa. I never thought to find you boys so big. You have grown so much the last year!" Again she gave each of them a big bear hug. "But come on, boys, I want to show you little Mary. Do you not want to see her?" And she reached out and took the little bundle from Mother Harmon's arms.

Little Mary had so much enjoyed the ride from the station that she slept almost all the way and was still sleeping when they

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arrived at the Harmon home. David looked at baby and to the inquiry of Elsie, "What do you think about her?" replied, "I can't tell you what I think about her yet; you will have to wait until she begins to cry and then I can tell you."

"But my baby does not cry," replied Elsie. "Come, Roy, tell me what you think about her."

But Roy could not be persuaded even to take a peep at the little baby face. Elsie took it all as a great joke, and they went into the house together. As Elsie laid the bundle of white cap, dress, and pink bootees on the bed, little Mary opened her eyes and began to look about her as if to say, "Where am I?" Elsie began to talk to her, and soon a smile spread over the little baby face which went straight to David's heart. When Elsie removed her cap he exclaimed, "Look at that curly hair!" Walking around to the side of the bed, he lifted a little ringlet in his fingers and began to talk to little Mary, to receive a baby smile also. Little Mary was the center of attraction to all except Roy. No amount of persuasion could induce him even to take a peep at her all that evening.

Next morning after Elsie had dressed the baby and given her her feed she lay her down on the bed, and when she did so little Mary found her thumb and began to suck it. All the time that Elsie had been dressing her, Roy had stood in the doorway watching her, and when little Mary found her thumb he burst into a big laugh and before he knew what he was doing exclaimed, "Mama, look at that baby go after her thumb; isn't that cute?" His face turned scarlet as all the others began to laugh, but he still lingered near the bed. Before the day had ended he approached Mother Harmon as she was preparing the evening meal and said, "Mama, Elsie has got a cute baby, hasn't she?"

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All of them tried to find a name suited to her other than Mary. Mother Harmon called her little Dumpling; David called her Curly, because of her curly hair; Father Harmon called her Sunshine because she was always smiling; but for several days Roy offered no suggestion for a name. At last when Elsie was preparing to return home he burst into the room saying, "I know what I shall call the baby. Her name is Peachy, because she is sweet as a peach." This settled it all, and in the Harmon home from that time on no one mentioned the baby as little Mary but she was always called Peachy.

When the time came for Elsie to be taken to the station for her return home, Roy needed no persuading to hold the baby on his lap on the trip to the station, for he was reluctant to turn her loose. When the train pulled out from the station taking Elsie and little Mary back to their own home, he laid his head on his mother's shoulder and sobbed as only a twelve-year-old boy can sob. "Peachy" had found a place in his heart which no one else could fill. Elsie's little girl was truly a wonderful baby and formed the topic of his conversation for weeks to come.

Chapter III

Three years have passed since Elsie brought little Mary to the Harmon home, and “Peachy” won Roy’s heart. Each year she had made two visits to her parents, and each time all could see how rapidly Mary was growing and learning those things that all children must learn in babyhood. In her third year she could talk plainly and ask so many questions that it kept all the Harmon family busy trying to answer them. Grandpa and Grandma would tire and occasionally tell “Peachy” she asked too many questions and send her away, but Uncle Roy never tired regardless of how many questions were asked nor how fast they came.

“Peachy” was Roy’s favored pet, and all could see that Uncle Roy was the chosen one of all the Harmon family for her. She was with him when he went to attend to some chores about the barn, or when he went to the field to bring up the stock to water, and ride back with him on old Fan. Sometimes when her little chubby legs would carry her no farther, Uncle Roy would lift her to his shoulder and, placing one foot on each side of his neck, and holding her little hands, give her a ride in this fashion back to the house. “Peachy” would scream with delight, and Roy would enjoy the ride no less than did she. It seemed while she was with them he had no other thought than to find some way to amuse her. This was a great relief to both Mother and Grandmother, for “Peachy” was

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ever trying to satisfy her curiosity, and often this led her into places where baby hands and fingers should not be found. But regardless of where she might be found or what she might be doing, Uncle Roy always found a way out for her and no punishment came her way when he was about.

But all things must come to an end sometime, and so did "Peachy's" visit with Uncle Roy come to an end, and Elsie returned to her home again, leaving Roy in tears as he said, "Good-bye" to his little "Peachy" at the station. Elsie promised to be with them during Christmas. He looked forward to that time with all his heart, expecting to have her with him again, and went about making preparations to that end. Every spare piece of money he could get was laid away that he might get something for little "Peachy," that there might be something nice for her to find in her stocking on Christmas morning. Roy could talk of nothing else. He and Grandma planned many things for Christmas when Elsie and little "Peachy" should be with them again.

Elsie's letters came regularly, and they were filled with promises of being with them again during the Christmas holidays. Dan was coming with her this time, and all were looking forward to a great time together. Roy had found many things to get for the baby that meant much to him. Among the toys which he selected for her was a set of building blocks which contained all the letters of the alphabet together with the picture of a number of animals and their names. When asked why he had selected these he said, "'Peachy' is so quick to learn anything that I wanted to teach her the letters on those blocks while they are here."

But life is filled with many disappointments, and we see our plans and our desires torn from their foundations and crumble to pieces before us, and so it was with Roy. The second week of

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December arrived. Roy and his mother arranged a room for Elsie and put a stove in her bedroom so that it might not be so cold for her and the baby, and all was in readiness for her. They watched the mail closely for word from her as to when she should arrive and when to meet her at the station. The long expected letter came at last, but what disappointment and anxiety it brought with it, for it stated that "Peachy" was very sick of a fever, and they could not come and would not feel safe to take her from home for the remainder of the winter, so they need not expect a visit from them now until they felt it would be safe to take their little darling away from home.

As Mother Harmon read this letter tears fell from her eyes and as she looked at her young son she saw tears were streaming down his cheeks although he had not uttered a word. Laying her hand upon his shoulder, she said, "I know this is just as great a disappointment to Elsie as it is to us, and it is all for the best, I am sure. I would not want her to come now and the baby sick for I fear it would only make her worse, and I want her to take care of our little 'Peachy.' "

Roy nodded his head and walked away, but there was a sad, disappointed look in his eyes as he appeared at the dinner table and he had no appetite for the food which Mother Harmon had prepared.

David had now passed his eighteenth birthday and was working in Whitefield for Mr. Tanner, the blacksmith. Roy would often ride in of an afternoon during the winter and often David would return home with him after work hours, and seldom a Saturday afternoon passed without a visit to the blacksmith shop from Roy. So this afternoon as he saddled old Fan he announced his intention of riding into town. "Better hitch her to the buggy,"

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said his father, “for David will want to come home with you, and it is going to be cold this afternoon.” So old Fan was hitched to the buggy, and soon Roy was driving toward Whitefield. Old Fan was feeling good; with well-shod feet she stepped briskly over the frozen ground and soon the trip to Whitefield had ended. Roy stopped in front of the Tanner blacksmith shop, hitched old Fan to the post which stood near, blanketed her, and then walked inside. Mr. Tanner was busy shoeing some horses, and David was repairing a farmer’s wagon when he entered. A number of men were standing around the forge which was roaring. Roy paid no attention to these but, walking up to where David was, broke the news to him of “Peachy’s” illness and that Elsie would not be with them during the Christmas holidays. David noticed the tremor in his voice and when he looked up saw the tears rolling down his cheeks.

“Well, I do declare,” exclaimed he; “I did not think you were that big a baby,” and he laughed heartily.

“What are you laughing about?” inquired Roy.

“I am laughing because a great big boy like you has to cry because his sister cannot be with him to eat dinner with him on Christmas,” replied David. “You must think that Santa Claus will pass you by this year,” and he laughed again.

“Well, I do not think this is any time to laugh,” retorted Roy. “Elsie says ‘Peachy’ has been very sick and is far from well now, and I cannot bear to think of the little thing having to suffer pain.” Tears began to roll from his eyes and down over his cheeks as he spoke; as he looked David in the eyes he asked, “Don’t you feel the least bit bad about it?”

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“Oh, yes, I guess I will have to say that I do not feel delighted to get such news,” replied David, “but I feel that Elsie is able to take care of her, and I do not think there is any need of worry just now. But I thought you were the boy that did not care anything about girl babies”; and David gave Roy a pinch on the ear and laughed again.

“Well, I like ‘Peachy’ and so do you,” hastily replied Roy.

“Surely I like ‘Peachy,’” said David, “but I am not going to cry because she cannot be with us during the Christmas holidays.”

The conversation then drifted into other channels as David began to inquire about things on the farm. When informed that his father expected him home for the night he spoke to Mr. Tanner, and accordingly arrangements were made that he might do so as Mr. Tanner said work was not rushing and he might leave the shop a little early, and need not be back to work before Monday afternoon. So Roy left the shop to do some shopping at one of the stores, and when he returned he carried a large bundle under his arm. This he carefully placed under the seat of the buggy. As David appeared wrapped in overcoat and muffler, Roy removed the blanket from old Fan and unhitched her from the hitching post; the two then climbed into the buggy and pulled the robe and horse blanket over their laps, turned around, and headed old Fan toward home.

Father Harmon had been true in his statement regarding the weather for it had indeed turned colder. The biting cold wind from the north blew against their faces and almost split their cheeks; it chilled them to the bone. It was too cold for conversation. The two brothers rode along in silence until they reached the top of the hill, when Roy remarked, “I hope Papa has a roaring fire when we get home, for I am chilled through and through.”

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“Well, I think he will have,” replied David, “for I see the smoke rolling from the chimney. I feel like I am almost frozen, too.”

Just a short distance from the hill old Fan stopped at the Harmon gate. David sprang to the ground and opened the gate as Father Harmon opened the door and came out calling to them, “Drive her in the shed and let her stand and you boys come on in to the fire, for I know you are cold. I shall come and unhitch her.” The boys did not need to be urged; they drove the horse into the shed and started for the house, where they found a roaring fire and a smell from the kitchen which told them a good supper would soon be spread before them. Father Harmon had attended to the evening’s chores before the boys came, and when he had unhitched and unharnessed old Fan and put her in her stall in the barn and returned to the house Mother Harmon called supper. Two hungry boys sat down to the table to do justice to the tempting dishes which Mother Harmon had prepared for them.

“How good everything tastes!” exclaimed David, as he filled his plate for the third time. “I tell you it seems good to get back home and eat Mama’s good cooking again. Mrs. Tanner is a very good cook, but there doesn’t anything taste like what Mama cooks. I do not know what I would do if I could not come home once in awhile.”

Father Harmon smiled at his good wife as she sat near him at the table and, reaching over, he gave her an affectionate pat on the shoulder, saying as he did so, “Now, you see Mama, I have always told you that you are a good cook. I feel just like David does.”

“I guess that is the way Elsie feels about it, too,” said Roy.

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This remark brought back to David the conversation between him and his brother in the Tanner blacksmith shop that afternoon, and he related how Roy came, telling him that “Peachy” could not be with them for Christmas and cried about it.

“I cried, too,” said his mother, “when I read her letter telling me that the baby was sick and that she could not come. I am disappointed and I am sure that she is also.”

“Well, it is all right for you to cry,” replied David, “for no one expects anything else from a woman, but a big boy like Roy is different.” And David laughed again.

“I guess it would be a little better for all of us if we would cry a little bit more and try to help each other more,” replied Father Harmon as he rose from the table.

Mother Harmon looked at her two sons as they sat there before her. The same blood coursed through their veins, yet they were unlike each other in every way. David, her “happy-go-lucky” boy who never took anything seriously, was of strong, muscular build like his father. He was a good mixer and could go with any crowd and had many friends, but he was the source of much anxiety on the part of his mother, for he was easily persuaded by his associates. His dark, heavy hair was well trained; it lay back from his high forehead, and he prided himself in keeping it well groomed. Nothing became a burden to him, for he had no time for worry.

Roy, her light haired, blue-eyed, slender, tender-hearted boy, so quick to love and so quick to hate, was a type of her people. No one could persuade him unless he had confidence in them and loved them. And when he loved them their burdens became his also, for he took them into his own life. He was very reserved and

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therefore had few associates. Mother Harmon could see her boys as they were and loved them for what they were. She loved David for his “happy-go-lucky” way and loved Roy for being so reserved and slow to form and make acquaintance. In her heart she would not have either of them otherwise, for they were her own.

“Mama, had we not better box those things for Elsie and send them to her by mail?” inquired Roy as he rose from the table.

“Yes, I think that is what we shall have to do,” replied Mrs. Harmon, “but I do not know when we shall get them mailed.”

“I shall have to take David back to Mr. Tanner’s Monday morning,” replied Roy, “and I can mail them then.”

“All right,” replied his mother; “we will get them ready after I have cleared away the dishes.”

The dishes were cleared away, and Mother Harmon brought a box from the smokehouse and began to wrap and pack presents which were for Elsie and her family. Roy went to the buggy shed, and when he returned to the house was carrying under his arm the package which he had purchased in town that day. “This is something else that I got for ‘Peachy’ today,” said he, as he handed it to his mother. She unwrapped it to find a lovely dressed doll with real hair and eyes that would open and shut.

“Oh, Son, why did you get such a good doll for her?” exclaimed Mother Harmon. “I fear it will last no time and she will just break it right away.”

“There is not anything too good for my ‘Peachy’ girl,” said Roy, as he smoothed down the doll’s dress, “and I wish that I might see her when they give it to her.”

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The last thing was packed, the box wrapped and addressed, and Roy took it with him to town as David returned to his work, mailing it at the post office in Whitefield.

Chapter IV

Christmas morning dawned with the sun riding in a clear sky, but with a cold, biting wind blowing from the north. A heavy snow had fallen the day before, and the ground was covered with a carpet of white. The bare branches of the trees creaked under the heavy weight of the snow upon them. A jingle of sleigh bells was heard, and as the Harmons looked from their frost-covered window they saw their neighbors, the Gregory family, go by in the old bobsled. Roy and David rushed to the door, threw it open, and cheered them as they passed by. There was an answering cheer from the Gregory children, the team passed on by, and the jingle of the bells died away in the distance.

“That is just about the way your Uncle Rufus will come over here today,” remarked Mr. Harmon as the boys returned to the fire.

“I hope they do,” replied Mrs. Harmon, as she laid some more wood in the stove and turned to baste the turkey which she was preparing to place in the oven.

“I do not think it matters much how they come, just so they get here, does it?” inquired her husband. “I hope they come pretty soon, for although I have just had my breakfast the sight of that turkey makes me hungry, and I should not care if they came right away.”

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“Well, if they were to come right now the turkey is not done, but if you would like to have raw turkey you may help yourself to it,” laughingly replied Mrs. Harmon, “but I think it does make a difference how they come, for that wind is biting this morning and if they come in the bobsled they can wrap up and keep so much warmer than if they came in the carriage. You see they can put the children in the bobsled on the hay with warm bricks to their feet and cover them up well, and they will not get cold at all. But I would not want to travel very far such a day as this. I am glad I can stay at home and cook dinner today instead of going somewhere else, and I do not envy Mrs. Gregory that twelve mile ride such a day as this. But I guess if I had a mother I would want to be with her on Christmas Day to eat Christmas dinner with her although I should have to ride through the chilly wind for twelve miles to get there.”

The jingling of bells was heard again and as the Harmons looked from their window, sure enough there was Uncle Rufus and his family in the old bobsled. The boys ran to open the gate, and Mr. Harmon laid some more wood on the fire, so there would be a warm fire when they came into the house. In they came—Uncle Rufus, Aunt Susan, and the four younger children, Carrie, Bessie, May, and three-year-old Danny. Henry, the eldest boy, stayed with Roy and David to help put up the team. They, too, soon entered and there was the usual exchange of greetings and presents, and Aunt Susan donned her kitchen apron and busied herself in helping to prepare the dinner. Father Harmon and his brother, Rufus, were left to visit with each other, and the children had their usual romp about the house.

Dinner was called, and the two Harmon families sat down to the table which was spread with all the dainties that were needed to

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make up a real Christmas dinner. Mary Harmon was one who understood how to prepare these special dishes, and so the turkey was done to a turning and the mince pie had the exact flavor needed to make it palatable. All were seated about the table; Father Harmon bowed his head to offer thanks for the food before them and ask the blessings of God upon it. "Bless, also, the absent ones from among us today," he continued, "and may they be as well supplied with the good things of life as we are and may their every need be supplied." Mother Harmon was seated next to Roy at the table; as her husband repeated these words she heard Roy take a short breath, and at her husband's "amen" she looked at her youngest son and saw his face get pale and his eyelids bat quickly as if to check tears which wanted to start. She saw also the trembling of the lips; yes, Mother saw and understood. Laying her hand on Roy's shoulder in an affectionate way, she said, "Now, Son, I have prepared you some special dishes. I had to drive you out of the kitchen several times while I was preparing them, but you can have all you want now." But Roy did not seem to be very hungry, and the food that he took on his plate was merely tasted and then left. The rest of the family did justice to what was set before them and all enjoyed the Christmas dinner but Roy. Long before any other of the family had finished, Roy excused himself, put on cap and muffler, and started toward the barn. Climbing the ladder to the hay mow, he threw himself face downward and there burst into tears. Unmindful of the cold he lay there for sometime until he had wept out the tears that had been held back for a number of days; then he rose, descended the ladder, washed his face with snow and dried it on the back of his knitted mittens, and started for the house.

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“What is wrong with Roy?” inquired Aunt Susan, as Roy excused himself from the table and she saw the food which remained on his plate; “is he not feeling well?”

Mother Harmon glanced at first her husband and then David before answering Aunt Susan’s question. How her mother heart went out to her boy as she knew what a battle he was fighting! How she wanted to spare him as she thought of his kind, sensitive nature and knew how keenly he felt the disappointment of not having Elsie and her family with them at this time! Should she really tell what she knew? While debating thus in her mind David spoke and rather disgustedly said, “No; he is not sick at all but just a great big baby. I dare say he has gone somewhere now to bawl like the baby that he is.”

Aunt Susan stared at him in amazement and then exclaimed, “Roy a baby? Why I never thought him to be a baby, for he has always been such a manly little fellow from babyhood on. I consider him quite a man now.”

“It would be well if you had just a little more feeling for your brother,” said Father Harmon to David.

“Feeling,” exclaimed David; “I think that I have as much feeling for him as I should have and you have more than you should have for he needs to be jerked out of some of his babyishness.” David then told Aunt Susan how Roy had acted when he broke the news to him in Tanner’s blacksmith shop that little Mary was sick and Elsie could not come home for Christmas.

“But I thought that he had just about got over that,” said Father Harmon. “I have heard him whistling and singing around here the last few days, and he seemed to be real jolly this morning.”

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“Yes,” said Mother Harmon, “but he noticed what you said as you offered thanks when you asked the Lord to remember the absent ones and supply them with the same as we are enjoying today. I noticed him at the time and that is what took away his appetite.”

“That does not make him a baby in my sight,” said Aunt Susan. “I wish more men were tender like him and could shed tears. It shows that his heart is easily touched and he has feeling for others.”

“It is just ‘Peachy,’ ” retorted David. “He doesn’t care so much about Elsie, but ‘Peachy’ is all that he thinks about and about all that he cares about. You should have seen what he got the child for Christmas. Every spare nickel he had was spent for her. He got her enough for half a dozen children.”

“What did you get for her?” inquired Aunt Susan.

David’s face reddened as he replied, “I did not get anything for her, but there wasn’t anything left to get after Roy got through.”

“You mean you could not get anything for the little ‘Peachy’ after you had finished buying for the big ‘Peachy,’ ” laughingly replied Father Harmon, at which remark they all burst out laughing for they knew of the friendship which had sprung up between David and Bessie Smith, a girl that lived near the Tanner’s in Whitefield and which caused David to shorten his weekend visits at home for he returned to Whitefield Sunday afternoon instead of waiting to be driven into town on Monday morning. They also knew that he had used the greater amount of his spare change to get her a nice Christmas present. David had no more to say about Roy, and so the subject was dropped with Aunt Susan remarking,

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“Roy may cry over his disappointment, but I am glad to hear that he is so attached to Elsie’s baby, for I think that an admirable quality in any young man.”

They all arose from the table and the women folk began to clear away the dishes. Carrie and Bessie dried them as Mother Harmon and Aunt Susan washed them. When about half finished they heard a loud call from the rear of the yard; they looked out and saw Roy rolling a huge ball of snow across the yard.

“A snow man,” exclaimed Henry as he hastily donned mittens and cap; “come on, David, let us help him.” And out the door he went on the run. The girls were soon wrapped in coats, hoods, and scarfs, and even little three-year-old Danny went out to see the sport of building a snow man. The snow was dry, and it was rather difficult to get it to cling together, but how those boys worked and the girls and Danny clapped their hands in glee as they saw a body built on to the base and then came arms and head! David brought some charcoal from the house to make eyes, nose, and mouth, and then placed an old cap on his head and a stick in his hand for a cane, and to finish him put a bright red tie about his neck. Below this he put some small pieces of charcoal which looked like buttons on his vest. When completed, they called to Mother Harmon and Aunt Susan to see what they had done.

As the women stepped to the back porch Roy walked to where they were standing and called out merrily, “What do you think of it, Aunt Susan?”

Aunt Susan laughingly replied, “It looks almost like a real man, doesn’t it? I will say that if I should see something like that after dark it would surely frighten me until I couldn’t tell you what I would do. You boys have certainly done well, for that is about the best snow man I have even seen.”

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Roy seemed very much pleased, and stepping to his mother's side, said in a low tone, "I wish 'Peachy' could see it; don't you?"

Mother Harmon laid her arm about her son's shoulder, pulled him to her and said, "Yes, Son, I do."

There was something about her voice as she spoke to him that caused him to look up into her face and he saw something in her eyes which drew him to her as never before, for he now knew that although he might be laughed at and ridiculed by others, Mother understood. Yes, Mother did understand her boy, and she knew what a battle was being fought that he might hide his disappointment and try to enjoy the Christmas festivities with the others. Yes, she understood and in the pat of her hand, the glance of her eye, and the tone of her voice, she tried to carry the message to her young son, "Mother understands."

Chapter V

Roy waited anxiously to hear from Elsie after sending the box containing the many nice things for their Christmas. He wanted to hear how Elsie enjoyed the things that he had sent her. A few days after Christmas a letter came telling them how much the package was appreciated, but Elsie closed her letter by saying, "I thought surely little Mary would love the doll Roy sent her more than anything else, but she lays it aside to play with her blocks. I never saw a child enjoy anything so much as she does those blocks, and she plays with them by the hour. It is surprising to see how she is learning the letters, too. She knows quite a few of them, and I think in a short time she will know all of them. She says, 'Tell Untle Woy thanks for the pittty blocks.' "

She could have said nothing that would have pleased Roy more than to hear she appreciated those blocks so well, and as he went about his chores or tried to study while in school there would a picture of a little girl he called "Peachy" come before him sitting on the floor playing with blocks. How his heart ached to be near her and aid her in the building of houses, or bridges, but most of all to help her learn the names of the letters on the blocks and then to put them together! Each week brought a letter from Elsie telling about Mary and those interesting blocks. January and February passed, and in March came another letter saying, "Mother, you

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would be surprised to hear how Mary can spell. She has learned all those letters on the blocks Roy sent her for Christmas and can now spell all the little words on them and can put them together. I have taught her how to spell Roy, and she will spell it again and again with her blocks. I am teaching her how to make the letters also. You do not know what a time I am having, for I have to keep her in the house all the time and she must have something to entertain her and I am certainly kept busy for there is no end to her desire to learn, and what is so remarkable about it she remembers what I tell her so well. I do not think it will be long until she will be reading. If I could get away to get her a book I should do so, but yet, I think she is doing well as she is. I give her pencil and paper, and she lies on her stomach on the floor for an hour at a time making letters. This is a life-saver to me, for she teases me all day long to tell her how to spell first one word and then another. To have any peace at all I give her pencil and paper and in this way I am left to do something else.”

All these things were talked over by mother and son. David seemed to take no interest in it as he had other things to occupy his mind, and he chided Roy rather sharply for having no thought other than “Peachy,” but Mother understood and many pleasant times were spent together by mother and son planning the future for Mary, the little girl who meant so much to both of them. Roy planned what should take place in the summer when she should again visit them. But he was not waiting until summer to do something for her on which his heart had been set, for when he returned from town the following Saturday afternoon after receiving Elsie’s letter he opened a package containing a Primer, some paper and pencils, some chalk, and a small blackboard. These were to be sent to “Peachy.” Mr. and Mrs. Harmon left their boy to do as he liked about sending things to Mary, and so the

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following week the package was sent, and there was another anxious wait.

Days passed and although each day Roy inquired if a letter had come from Elsie, he would receive the disappointing answer, "No letter today." He could scarcely contain himself, for he wanted news from "Peachy." After more than a two weeks' wait he was rewarded for there was not only a letter from Elsie, but little Mary had also sent a printed letter to Uncle Roy, thanking him for the pretty book, the pencils and paper, the chalk and blackboard, and telling him that she was learning to write. This was all printed, and some of the letters were large, and some small, running up and down the lines, but they meant much to the big boy who loved this little girl so much. This letter was laid away and prized very highly, for it surely meant much to Roy.

But another disappointment was awaiting him, for as much as he had planned on having "Peachy" with him that summer, in April came a letter from Elsie stating that it would be impossible for her to visit them that summer, explaining to Mother in a way that she understood. Roy was too disappointed to hide the tears, and laying his head over on Mother's shoulder, the two of them wept out their disappointment together.

"I just feel like starting out and hoofing it there, getting that little 'Peachy' and bringing her right back with me," said Roy rather indignantly. Mother noticed the indignant ring in his voice and, sitting down with him beside her, she there told him that his future life depended a great deal on conquering self in his early youth, and that he could make this disappointment make a man out of him, or he could harbor his disappointment, feeling that he had been badly abused and thereby cultivate a sullen, morbid disposition.

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“Those who accomplish anything in this world are those who rise above their disappointments and seek to help others,” said she as she gave him an affectionate pat on the shoulder. “I know that my boy is greatly disappointed, but no more so than I am; but now what shall we do? I mean to try to help you by making things pleasant for you and bring something else in your life to cover this disappointment in a measure, and now what are you going to do?”

Roy looked down at the floor where he was sitting for some time and then, lifting his head, he gave his Mother that knowing look as he said, “I understand, Mother, and I shall forget my own disappointment and try to cover yours in some way,” and this he did. There was not any little act of kindness which he did not perform for her. He had always been a very tender, affectionate child, but he became more tender and Mother, noticing each little attention, tried in every way that she could to do something for her boy to help him to overcome in this disappointment in his life. Roy would whistle as he went about his work at the house or barn or in the field, and often when his Mother denied herself something that she might do for her boy, Roy would whistle or sing the louder as he would say, “Mother understands.” Then there would be something for him to do that he might repay his Mother for the little sacrifice which she had made for him. In this way Roy soon overcame his own disappointment and in after years looked back on this little experience as an experience which helped him to be an overcomer in later life.

Chapter VI

Spring waned and summer set in with its scorching heat. Wheat had been harvested and threshed, and the corn stood high in the fields, the leaves rolled up in the scorching sun. The berry bushes and weeds along the public highways were of a gray color, made so by the dust from the road which had settled upon them. Many of the creeks in the country had gone dry, and numbers of the country folk were without water, only as they would haul it from some neighbor or from some public well. There had been no rain for several weeks, and many were becoming ill.

The Harmon family were well blessed in having an abundant supply of water, and were sharing it with their unfortunate neighbors. On the Harmon farm was a well which had never been dry and the supply of water seemed inexhaustible, for neighbors came from the east, west, north, and south, hauling water for their family supply, and also to water their stock. Tanks were filled to furnish water for the different threshing machines in the country, and Mr. Harmon prided himself on his well that would furnish good, clean, pure water for the community. The well was deep, and he felt free from any disease germs that are so often found in drinking water during the summer months. There was much sickness among the people, but not any in the Harmon community. Many were coming down with that dreadful disease, typhoid.

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Numbers had died, and some entire families had been smitten with the disease.

The latter part of August a letter came from Elsie informing them that Dan had not been well for some time, and was now not able to be out of bed, and she feared he had the fever. She also stated her own physical condition and what it would mean should Dan be sick any length of time. Another letter two days later informed them Dan really had the fever and was continually raging and asked if someone could not help her out. Immediately Mother Harmon made ready and went to her.

Dan was really a sick man, for he lay for weeks in a delirious condition and had to be cared for constantly. They despaired of his life. After several weeks he began to amend, but the fever left him in such a weakened condition that he needed constant care for some time, and Mother Harmon stayed on. Although Dan began to improve another care came to Mother Harmon, for Elsie presented her husband at this time with a new son which she named Otis Harmon. This only increased the burden upon Mother Harmon's tired body as she cared for Dan, who in his weakened condition required special attention, and then to care for Elsie and the new baby. Mary had been sent to an aunt, who tried to help out in this way. It seemed difficult to get anyone to assist as all feared the disease and thought it might be they too would come down with it. Mother Harmon worked untiringly and unceasingly, sparing not herself or her feelings, trying to help her loved ones who needed care and attention. When baby Otis was ten days old, Mother Harmon became ill, and after a few days had to return to her own home. This left Elsie to care for her baby and also to do many other duties about the place which were too much of a burden for her in her present physical condition. The aunt who had kept Mary

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during Dan's illness now came to render what assistance she could, but it was not like when Mother Harmon had been there and many strenuous tasks that should not have been Elsie's were done by her. Dan gained strength rapidly, but Elsie could not recover from that tired, distressed feeling all the time.

Mother Harmon returned home and for some time seemed to be on the way to recovery. She did not lack for care and attention, for Roy and Father Harmon were untiring in their efforts to make her comfortable and to care for her. Her condition was due to overwork and the strain of caring for Dan and Elsie. The physician told them a few weeks of complete rest would soon put her on her feet again and she would be able to be about her duties in the home. But it seemed she was slow in gaining strength, although she was not confined to her bed all the time. October passed, and November came in with its cold, windy weather. A light snow had fallen, and Father Harmon laid in a good supply of wood that Mother Harmon would have plenty to keep the house warm without having to step outside to get it. She had prepared the morning's meal and after lying down to rest, arose and began to tidy up the house a little. As she bent over the big wood box to get some wood for the stove, she was seized with a peculiar feeling and fell on the floor, where she was found when Father Harmon entered the house some time later. She was unable to assist herself in any way and could scarcely speak, but after some effort made them to understand how it all occurred. A physician was immediately summoned, who pronounced her case an attack of paralysis and her condition serious. All was done for her that could be done, but at the end of the third day while Father Harmon, David, and Roy stood about her bed, and some kind neighbors and friends tried to render all the assistance that could be given, Mother Harmon passed into eternity.

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What a blow this was to the family, and especially to Roy, for she had been the one who understood, the one in whom he could confide and feel that there was something akin in her own heart to that which he felt! Where would he go now and to whom could he turn? He went about as one in a trance without a word to say to anyone even though he was asked about what his desire was concerning the burial. All that he could reply was, "Do as you think best, for I cannot tell you." No tears came to him to relieve him, but his pale face and quivering body told of a grief that had struck deeply, eating into the heart's core. When her body was laid in the casket and the family gathered about, Roy stood speechless, staring at the remains of her who had been all to him that a mother could be and his sole confidant and the one who understood. No tears came to his relief, but his body trembled as one with a chill, and his face paled so that all could see his grief was too deep for tears.

But much as friends extended sympathy to Roy, all hearts went out to the only daughter so many miles away and unable to attend the funeral. Her health since the birth of baby Otis had been such that she could not get away from home, and the care of the two children so occupied her time and exacted all the strength that she had so that she was not able to get away. So Father Harmon, David, and Roy, with the many other relatives and friends, followed Mother Harmon to her last resting place, and after lowering the casket into the grave the three returned to the home that had been robbed of all that made it really home, for "What is home without a mother?" David returned to his work, but as Father Harmon and Roy returned to their daily routine of work on the farm they realized their sad loss more than any of the bereaved ones.

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Mother Harmon had been gone two weeks, when one evening Roy saddled one of the horses and, leading it from the stable, started to mount, when his father called to him to know what he meant to do. Upon being informed that he meant to go to the cemetery Father Harmon began to remonstrate as there was a storm approaching. The lightning was flashing across the sky, the thunder was rolling, and the blackened clouds spoke of a real downpour of rain.

“Why, Son,” said Father Harmon, “don’t you know that you will be drenched, for you will not get to the cemetery before the storm will break? You must not go now.”

But no amount of persuasion was of avail, and as Roy mounted the horse he said, “I have stood it as long as I can, Papa, and I must go. I want to tell Mother just how I feel, for she was the only one who ever understood me. I am sure now that she will understand. I want to tell her that I mean to follow in her footsteps. I can’t bear it any longer, and I must go. I shall tell her I am coming after her.”

Father Harmon shook with emotion as he said, “If that be the case go, Son, and God be with you to protect you.” Roy rode off into the gathering storm toward the place where rested the body of her that had meant so much to him. On he rode and as he neared the cemetery the storm broke upon him in all its fury. The wind blew until it seemed he could scarcely retain his seat in the saddle, but still he rode on; the rain came down in sheets, but on he went. As he entered through the gates of the cemetery, there came a blinding flash, and his horse swerved, and there was a deafening roar as the lightning struck a tree nearby and a limb fell directly across his path. The horse stopped short as if blinded by the flash of lightning, but Roy urged it on.

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Soon he was beside a newly-made mound. As he knelt beside it, while the rain poured down upon him and the lightning flashed about him and the thunder roared above and about him, Roy poured out his heart unto his mother's God and in doing so found relief in an outpouring of tears. For some time he knelt there weeping as only one can in such circumstances, but as weeping subsided, he lifted his voice in supplication to God and there beside the grave of his mother while the elements roared about him Roy found the peace for which his troubled soul had been longing and the assurance that someday he would meet his mother again. The rain poured down upon him as it sometimes does at this unusual time of year, and as Roy knelt there with the water streaming from his hat brim and running in streams about the grave, Roy still knelt beside his mother's grave and was in such agony of soul that he became oblivious of all of his surroundings. The storm abated, and as Roy arose from his knees, looking down on the grave of the one who meant so much to him, he said, "O Mother, I had to come to you again, for you are the only one who really understood me, and I am sure that you understand me now. I have made your God my God, and mean to follow in your footsteps, and someday we shall meet again." He then mounted his horse and rode back home. Although the emptiness of his heart which had been made by the death of his mother had not been filled, relief had come in tears and the decision which he had made had brought a deep settled peace in his soul that eased the heavy ache in his heart. The rain had ceased, and the evening had become chilly, but although Roy had been drenched he did not feel the chilly winds that followed the storm. He had found the relief for which his soul had longed and balm for his aching heart.

Upon arriving home, after unsaddling and unbridling his horse, Roy walked into the house, where he met his father who had

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not ceased to walk to and fro across the floor all the time that he had been gone. Going across the floor toward him, Roy laid his hand on his father's shoulder and said, "I have settled it, Papa, and have found the relief that I desired. I have made Mama's God my God also, and I knew that Mama would understand. I found the relief while kneeling beside her grave, and I know that I shall meet her again someday."

Father Harmon clasped his son in his arms and heavy sobs shook his frame. Tears now came to Roy's relief, and the two sobbed out an understanding of each other. The storm had opened up a new day for each of them. For some time they stood clasped in each others arms; then Roy went to his own room and changed his clothing, picked up his mother's Bible, lighted a lamp, and opened the Bible to the 116th Psalm. He there read that which brought great satisfaction to his soul.

Chapter VII

After the subsiding of the storm the thermometer began to drop, and when morning dawned the ground was frozen and winter had set in in earnest. Thanksgiving found the streams all frozen and shortly after a snowfall which never entirely melted away until the spring thaw. Many times in the winter the roads were impassable because of the drifted snow. For days in the rural districts there would be no communing with the public. Fences were hidden, trees were laden with their heavy weight of snow, and briar thickets took on the appearance of huge mounds. This continued for many weeks, and in the rural districts schools were closed until the roads could be opened to traffic. After each heavy snow there would be severe cold, and where one could get through sleighing and sledding were good, and the sleigh bells were heard along the public highway. The highway leading past the Harmon home was a succession of hills and hollows, but after the heavy snowstorm it looked like one level stretch of road, and so for weeks was impassable.

All this time Roy and his father lived secluded lives, unable to get away except the snow hardened and they could walk over the fences and over the drifts. What a lonely life it was without her who had meant so much to the household! Roy's grief increased as the days lengthened into weeks, and the deep snow kept them

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penned in through the long, cold winter. How he longed at times to be able just to visit the cemetery, but in this he was disappointed for the roads were impassable! He felt that just to be near her would ease the aching in his heart. He mentioned this to his father one evening as they sat beside the fire. As the father drew his chair near that of his youngest son, his own voice trembled with emotion. He said, "Roy, do you not remember the night when you received your diploma from the hand of our county superintendent, stating that you had finished the course prescribed by the common school law?"

"Surely I remember it," replied Roy, "but what has that to do with me now? It brings me no comfort in the loss of Mama," and, burying his head in his arms, he sobbed aloud.

Father Harmon was so overcome that he could not speak for some time, and the two were silent save for Roy's sobs, but with all the effort that he could put forth Father Harmon spoke again, "And do you remember how proud your mother was of you that night after you delivered your oration at the commencement exercises, and then framed your diploma for you and hung it in your room?"

Roy nodded his head, and his father continued, "How would you have felt had she wept and cried when you received your diploma and sat about grieving and weeping because you had finished the graded school and had she refused to sign your report card?"

Roy looked up into his father's face with a quizzical expression in his eyes, as he asked, "Papa, why do you ask me such questions when you know that Mama could never have done such a thing as that?"

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“I know she would not have done such a thing as that,” replied Father Harmon, “but what would you have thought had she done such, and how would you have felt?”

“I should have felt very bad, I am sure,” said Roy, “and would have thought she did not want me to finish school, but that is not to be thought of, for it was so unlike Mama to do any such thing as that.”

“Did you get any pleasure when you received your diploma?” inquired Father Harmon.

“I should say that I did,” replied Roy, “for I felt that I was walking in the air when I stepped down off that platform carrying that roll of paper in my hand.” “I thought so,” said Father Harmon, “but what would it have been had your mother refused to sign your report cards?”

Roy straightened himself in his chair as he said, “Papa, why do you talk like that when you know that she never felt like she wanted to return my card unsigned, for I always made good grades; and she was pleased to sign my cards?”

“I am sure that she was,” replied Father Harmon, “and will you be pleased to sign hers now?”

“I do not know what you mean by saying that,” said Roy, in a perplexed tone of voice.

Here Father Harmon laid his arm on his son’s shoulder and, while his voice trembled with emotion, he said, “I mean just this, Son: your mother has finished in the great school of life to receive her diploma from the great Master’s hand which is a crown of life, and he has presented her report card to you for you to sign, and are you ashamed to do so?”

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Roy laid his head on his father's shoulder and sobbed aloud as he said, "Oh, no, no, a thousand times no. I am not ashamed of the report of her life, for it was perfect."

"Will you then sign the card?" inquired his father. "All that you have to do is to say, 'Amen, Lord, thy will, not mine be done.' In this way you can enter into the joys and pleasures which are sure to be hers in the great commencement of Eternal Life, and although it does not fill the vacancy left, it does ease the heartache. Will you do it, Son?"

"I will do my best," replied Roy, as he gazed into his father's face. And he did, for from that time on there was a sweetness attached to the death of his mother which he had never gotten before, and although it did not dry the tears which would often start when thinking of her who meant so much to him, he surrendered and submitted it all to him who understands all things, and in this he found great comfort. The conversation between Father and Son on that evening around the fire also brought them closer together, and some of the companionship which had been between Mother and Son was now transmitted to Father; so that many pleasant evenings were spent together during the long, cold, wintry nights.

There had been no mail delivery at the Harmon home for the past two weeks, and then came three letters from Elsie. These were opened according to the date of mailing and in each she informed them of her physical condition. It seemed that she had begun work too soon after the birth of baby Otis, and she could gain no strength. In the second letter opened she told them she meant to go to a specialist the next day and would write more when she knew more. So the next letter was to contain the desired news of her condition, and Roy opened it quickly and began reading. It stated

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that the specialist had found her tubercular and he also found that baby Otis was blind. He was not qualified to examine the baby's eyes perfectly as that was not his specialty, but they meant to take him to an eye specialist and see if it really were true. This was done; and another letter later told of the hopelessness of the baby's ever seeing anything, for he was born without vision and would have to remain that way so long as he lived. Elsie also stated she was getting weaker all the time and having those dreadful night sweats. Each letter contained news of Mary's progress in learning to spell and to read and write. Occasionally there would be a short note written to Uncle Roy, in her own hand.

Thus the winter wore away and spring came with its warm sun and its heavy rains, and the entire community was mud and water bound, for in many places bridges were washed out by the heavy, swollen streams. But in the Harmon home there were many pleasant evenings spent together, for father and son had come to understand each other and were drawn to each other as never before. Roy desired the company of his father above anyone else, and Father Harmon likewise. A real companionship existed, and Roy felt that "Papa understands," while Father Harmon often remarked to others, "Roy is certainly a level-headed boy, and I can reason with him just like I can with an old man."

David came home occasionally, but he found nothing on the farm now to keep him, and he spent most of his time in town. His father often tried to advise him about some matters, but he would resent it and inform his father, "I am making my own way and think that I can get by all right." He did get by, but in his getting by there was a breach made between him and his father and also between him and Roy.

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April came, and with it the busy time of farming. It kept Roy and his father busy on the farm to prepare meals and then do the work about the place, but as a great deal of the farm was in pasture, not much plowing needed to be done in the spring and this Roy did, leaving all the lighter work about the place for his father to do. The latter part of April brought news to them that Elsie could not get well and her time was short, as she was failing fast; so Father Harmon and Roy went to her. David could not be persuaded to go, although Elsie begged to see him. He had told his father so often that he was making his own way, that when he did not have the means to take him to her, he refused the proffered help of his father. So the two went, remaining with Elsie until the first week in May she passed into eternity, leaving Mary aged four, and baby Otis aged eight months. This was surely a hard blow for Dan, for who would want to take care of a blind baby?

But baby Otis was a lovable child and of a pleasant disposition. Like all blind unfortunates he had a keen ear and what he failed to possess with his eyes did not escape his ears; and he was a merry little fellow. Mary loved him to adoration and was never too busy in her play not to stop when she could do something to amuse her baby brother.

The death of Elsie brought Roy and "Peachy" together again and with the same love as before. All could see that Roy had not the feeling for baby Otis that he had for Mary, and many remarked about it. Roy tried to enjoy Otis, but many hours were spent with "Peachy" listening to her read or trying to teach her something new, and as she was eager to learn this was a pleasure to both teacher and pupil. But there must be another separation, for Roy must return with his father to their own home. It was a pitiful sight when the "good-byes" were said, especially between father-in-law

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and son-in-law, for the great loss had meant much to each of them, and Father Harmon knew the great loss that Dan sustained in the loss of Elsie far exceeded his loss, for where is there such a loss as that of a bosom companion? As Roy clasped Dan's hand, he said with quivering voice, "I cannot do anything now for Elsie's children, but I mean to some day and you may count on me for it, too."

Mother Dennison came to aid Dan in taking care of the children, and she took special interest in Mary, teaching her many little rhymes and children's songs and also giving her some light duties about the house which were hers exclusively. She filled the wood box, carried kindling, dusted the furniture, and did many other things about the place until she was called "Grandma's Little Helper." Baby Otis was not neglected in any way, for Mary and Grandma took special care of him; and Dan seemed to live only for his children. He had seemed fond of them before Elsie's death, but now he seemed to lavish all his affection on them. Each evening found him with one on each of his knees, singing to them, or romping with them on the floor. He prepared each of them for bed and dressed them in the mornings. When Grandma Dennison spoke to him about it and said she could do it very well, he replied, "All the pleasure I have now is in my children; don't deny me this." So no more was said about it, and thus the early part of Mary's childhood was spent with an adorable father.

Chapter VIII

Mary is now six years of age and baby Otis two. Mary started to school at the opening of the fall term and made rapid progress. She was very studious and far ahead of the other children of her age. At the close of her first term of school she was promoted to the third grade and considered one of the best spellers in the country. It was not an uncommon occurrence for her to carry off the honor of being the last one on the floor during what they called their "Friday afternoon spelling matches." Mary seldom was beaten in these spelling contests although she was only six years of age. She had an idea of the sound of letters and delighted to spell. Many evenings at home Dan drilled her in spelling until before the close of her first school term she could handle words of five or six syllables with perfect ease. In her other studies she did not progress so rapidly, as some of them were very difficult for her; so that at the age of nine she had only completed the fourth grade, but was considered the champion speller of the country.

Dan was indeed proud of his little daughter and was a devoted father to both his children. For some months after Elsie's death his grief seemed too deep for any consolation, but however deep the wound it will heal in time; and that was the way with Dan. Elsie had been gone fourteen months when Myra Rainey came to spend the summer with her aunt who lived near the Dennisons. She came

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as a helper to her aunt, who was not well and who needed someone to assist her that summer, as she had several hired men to care for, and Myra was surely a splendid helper. She was twenty years of age and a beautiful girl, very pleasant and congenial; and soon made friends in the community. As the two families lived near each other she was often found in the Dennison home and became very much attached to Mary and Otis, and they to her. She would often come to get the children that they might be with her when she would be alone in her aunt's home. She was always so kind and lovable to them that they soon returned that love and when asked who they liked best of all would often say, "Myra Rainey." Her being in the Dennison home so often and she so fond of the children, soon won Dan's friendship, and it was not long until this friendship became mutual between them. The following spring the two were married. Grandmother Dennison was pleased with the match, expressing herself as "just delighted" and truly she was, for she saw Myra as a kind, good girl, one who loved Dan's children almost to adoration. Dan took her to his own home to be the mother of his children, feeling he had found a woman whom he could trust and one who loved the children almost equal to his love.

She seemed to be very fond of the children, and many evenings were spent in the home with the four of them gathered together, each holding a child on his lap. But this was not for long, for she soon saw how Dan adored his children and became jealous of them, and instead of coming together with them in the evening she would often say, "Dan, put the children down, or put them to bed, and then come and sit with me for a while." At first Dan paid no attention to her, until one evening as he invited her to take her place with them she retorted rather sharply, "No, I thank you; when you get through with your children if you have any time left

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you may then spend that with me, but it doesn't seem that you care for anyone or anything else but your children. I think that is all you cared to get a wife for—just to have someone to see after them.”

Dan was very much surprised to hear such, but from that time on took notice that she had no patience with them and would often scold them sharply for the most trivial offense. A few times he tried to remonstrate only to find that the beautiful, smiling face of Myra Rainey would be changed into the appearance of an approaching tornado, and her kind words be changed into sharp ones, cutting and slashing as they went. He could not pay any particular attention to them without an outburst from her, this to be followed up by the children being severely punished in some way; so he who had once been an adoring father became one who seldom noticed his children other than to speak to them occasionally or tell them something that he wished them to do. There were no more pleasant evenings spent together and no more preparing them for bed, for Mary had this task to do. Elsie had taught her to repeat a childish prayer, and Grandmother Dennison had in turn taught Otis, but this was at last forbidden in Dan's home by the new wife. When Dan inquired into this as to why she should refuse to let them repeat their prayer she said, “I know you think your children smarter than any other children in the world, but they are not, for I don't see anything so exceptionally smart about them. I know they do not know what they are saying, and it is merely a mockery. I do not care to see children try to be so goody, goody at night and then be real little devils through the day, and that is just what they are. I have to contend with so much that I feel it is all just a mockery.” We shall say nothing of the scene which followed, but the children went to bed from that time on without repeating their prayer.

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Mary was now seven years of age and again in school, but she did not make the progress in her studies that she had formerly, for there was no one to assist her in her studies. Dan tried to assist her one evening only to be told if he meant to do that they would just keep Mary home from school, and she would be spared the bother of preparing her for school, that she had a teacher whom he was helping to pay who could give her all the assistance with her lessons that she needed. There was another quarrel in which Myra won, and Mary was sent to bed.

Children now began coming into the Dennison home; first Caroline; then fifteen months later, Nancy; then in eighteen months the twins, Elmer and Ellen. Mary was now past nine years of age, but there was no more school for her. There was too much to be done in the home, and she could not be spared. Myra's own children did not suffer from want of attention, but Mary and Otis could do nothing that would not bring down sharp censure. Mary worked from morning until night, doing work that was far too strenuous for one of her age, receiving no word of praise from her stepmother and occasionally a sharp censure from her father. The twins were very cross, and it was a very common occurrence for Mary to be called from her bed at night to help take care of them. Many were the family quarrels, and the once beautiful, smiling, kind-spoken Myra Rainey usually came out victorious, and then would follow days of punishment for Mary and Otis. Myra had developed into a quarrelsome, nagging, old scold.

When Mary was eleven years of age another girl, Margaret, was born into the home, only to remain a short time. And until this time Mary had given no thought of what was beyond death. There was the funeral; and the kind minister spoke of a life beyond this one which went deep into the childish heart. As he addressed the

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family at the close of the discourse he quoted the words of David when he said, "I cannot bring him back, but I shall go to him," and then told of the hope of meeting after death.

This did not escape Mary's ears, and she pondered it in her heart. She did not have the privilege of attending Sunday school or church services that she might be enlightened on the subject, but she thought of it often. Although Margaret had only been with them a few months, Mary had loved her dearly. And as she had the constant care of the smaller children, Mary received her first smile and her first baby coo, and if there was any chance of ever meeting her little baby sister she wanted to know just how to do it.

A few weeks after the death of Margaret, Mary approached her stepmother on this subject, but as she could not enlighten her and as the question only annoyed her because of her own lack of spiritual life, she received a sharp rebuke and was sent away. But that did not erase from her mind the thought of meeting her again, and when she had an opportunity she mentioned it to her aunt, who came to spend a few days with them. This aunt was the favorite sister of Dan's, and because of this fact, much disliked on the part of Myra, who made her stay with them just as disagreeable as she could. But Mary worshiped at her feet and felt free to ask her any question. These two were much together, and Mary opened her heart to her aunt regarding the question of meeting little Margaret again.

Millie Fletcher had not been a spiritual woman until God visited in her own home and called away her own little babe. The very thing which now was puzzling Mary came forcibly to her, and she came before God as a penitent soul and received the assurance that she would meet her darling again. When Mary pressed her question upon her she explained it as best she could to the child,

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and although Mary could not understand it all, she grasped this thought, that we are two people living together, a body and a soul. The body must die and go back to dust, for God made it from dust, but the soul that lives in the body goes back to God. If it has been good it will be with God and with all good people, but if it has been bad it will never see any good people any more. This was about all the conception she had of this vital truth, but as her Aunt Millie ceased talking, she threw her arms about her neck and, laying her head on her aunt's shoulder, began to cry as she said, "O Aunt Millie, I mean to be good and then someday I shall go to meet little Margaret."

This thought was before her for a long time, but as the days wore away into weeks, and weeks to months, the wound healed in the childish heart and the loss of the little sister was forgotten as the work of the home was laid more and more on her.

But it was not to be entirely erased for news came to them of Grandpa Harmon's death, and again the thought of a life beyond this one stirred in the child heart. She had loved Grandpa Harmon dearly, but now he had been called away. As her tears fell upon receiving the news of his death, there went a cry out of her heart, "I want to meet him again."

Chapter IX

Roy Harmon left his brother David's home in Whitefield, purchased a ticket, and boarded the train. He was going again to see "Peachy," the only one who really claimed his love since the death of his father and mother. Roy had tried to be a brother to David, but their dispositions were so different that they could not agree. As David was now the head of a family, he seemed not to care anything at all for his brother.

After the death of Father Harmon, David married and offered Roy a home with him, which was accepted, but it was only for a few months, for David was so selfish that he thought all Roy's earnings should be given over to him, although Roy was paying his board weekly. Many times he would borrow money from Roy with a promise of refunding it in a certain length of time. When Roy really needed it and would mention the fact to his brother, he would be met with resentment. At last the day came when David again asked Roy for a loan and was refused, and a quarrel ensued in which Roy took his belongings and went elsewhere. But he could not be satisfied. One day the thought of joining the navy came to him, but he must first see his little "Peachy," so he was now on his way to her.

He walked into the Dennison yard unannounced. It was a surprise to all to see him, although Dan, Mary, and Otis were

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delighted. Roy was a great favorite of Dan's because of the feeling which he always bore for Elsie and Mary. He received a warm welcome, but as he looked about him disappointment was written on his countenance and a look of sadness filled his eyes. He could see that his little "Peachy" was neglected. Caroline, Nancy, and the twins were dressed in nice play suits, but his "Peachy" was shabbily dressed in faded calico, which had been patched and repatched. He saw also she was the servant in the home, for she was up early in the morning and with milk pail in hand, away to do the milking, then strain it away, and while the others ate breakfast, "Peachy" busied herself with making beds, sweeping, and straightening things about the place. Then after taking the "leavings" at the table she went about clearing away the dishes. Myra was a very particular housekeeper and free to find fault with anything that did not come up to her close inspection. The younger children had time for play, but not so with "Peachy," for there was no time left for her from her work. Otis helped her in many things, but he had to see with his fingers and therefore could not assist her as he could have had he been able to see. But he helped her with the dishes and with the carrying in of the wood and in many other ways. Roy also noticed the great change in Dan, for he had become silent and unassuming. He tried in many ways to get alone with Mary, but Myra saw to it that they were not alone, for when she found them so, she would always have something else for Mary to do which would take her away from him. But he was determined to be alone with her sometime. Early one morning as he saw Mary start with her milk pail toward the cow lot, he started in the opposite direction for his morning's walk. He went in this direction for some distance, then leaped over the fence and approached the cow lot from the rear.

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Mary was busy milking, sitting on her milk stool, and all unconscious of any observer. As Roy approached he heard her singing, and as he listened tears streamed down his face as he again heard the voice of her who was long since lying in the silent city on the hillside some few miles distant. Elsie was again singing as she had sung to him in his childhood, and it brought back memories of a pleasant home with father, mother, brother, and sister before the cruel hand of death came in to separate them. Elsie possessed a beautiful voice, and it was reproduced in "Peachy." As Roy stood listening something stirred within him as he said to himself, "Some day others shall hear that voice also."

He approached Mary, who smiled as he said, "Here, 'Peachy,' let me try my hand at milking. It has been some time since I pailed a cow," and, sitting down on the milk stool, he convinced her in a very short time that he had not forgotten how to do it, for the milk streamed into the pail and soon the foam was running over the top.

Mary laughed at the expression he had used of "pailing a cow," and this made an opening for conversation. Roy had noticed her shabby clothes, and now as he looked at her feet he saw an old pair of shoes worn out, with scarcely any soles to protect her feet from the briars and thistles which were growing about the cow pasture where she had to go daily to drive the cows to the lot. Her shoes were laced with an old blue calico string, and a white string was tied to the end of her hair which hung in one braid down her back. She had not lost all the curl of her babyhood days, for her hair hung in little ringlets about her face.

"Wouldn't you like to go to town with me today?" inquired Uncle Roy as he looked into her face from where he was sitting on the milk stool.

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“Would I?” exclaimed Mary; “I should say that I should, but that is not to be thought of.”

“And why is it not to be thought of?” inquired Roy.

“Why, Mother wouldn’t let me go,” replied Mary.

“But we will ask your father,” said Roy, “and if he says it is all right she will have nothing to say then. You leave it to me, and I shall ask him as we eat breakfast.”

“But, Uncle Roy, I have nothing to wear,” quickly replied Mary as a blush spread over her face and neck and she looked away across the field.

“‘Peachy,’ do you mean to tell me that you have no dresses to wear?” inquired Roy as he rose from the milk stool.

“I have none better than the one that I have on,” replied Mary, “and no other shoes than these either.”

“But why do you not have?” again inquired Roy. “The other children all have clothes; why haven’t you?”

“Mother says that I do not need them for I never go any place, and she says these are good enough to wear about home for me to work in,” replied Mary.

“But where did you get them?” again questioned Roy.

“I made them out of some of Mother’s old ones,” replied Mary. “She often gets some new dresses and then she lets me have some of her old ones that I can make some for myself, and sometimes they are real nice, too.”

“Do you make your own dresses?” inquired Roy.

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“Why, surely I do,” laughingly replied Mary; “who do you think would make them for me? Why, I make dresses for Caroline and Nancy, too, and sometimes make Mother’s dresses for her.”

They stood in the cow lot talking for some time—Roy asking, and Mary answering questions. At the close of that conversation a real resentment rose in his heart against Dan because of some things which he permitted to be done against the daughter of his own sister and who was as much his own child as were the other children in the home.

“We shall go to town today,” said Uncle Roy as they started toward the house, Roy with one arm about “Peachy” and with the pail of foaming milk in his hand. How Mary’s heart went out to Roy at that time, for it was the first little act of kindness or appreciation that she had had for many, many days. She lingered about as the family sat down to breakfast to hear what the outcome would be of his inquiry to go to town.

When Roy approached the subject to Dan, before he had time to reply, Myra answered, “Oh, no, I could not possibly spare her today, for I have so much to do.” Roy ignored her as though she had not spoken and said again to Dan, “I want to take Mary and Otis to town with me for I am leaving shortly for the navy and will be gone for a long time, and I want to leave something for them to remember my last visit with them before leaving. You know we do not know what will terminate before I return, and I may never return. May they go with me?”

“You may take Otis if you want to, but I told you that I could not spare Mary for I need her,” said Myra very emphatically.

Again Roy turned to Dan and in a positive tone said, “What do you say? May I take my sister’s children with me to town?”

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“Yes, they may go,” said Dan, as he gave his wife a look which was meant for silence; “and I shall go with you, too. Mary, get ready,” and he rose from the table.

“I have nothing to do to get ready,” replied Mary, “for this is the best that I have to wear.”

“Very well,” replied Dan.

We shall not try to picture the scene in the Dennison home when Myra found that for one time she could not have her way. Roy did not escape the bite of her sharp tongue. But Mary and Otis went to town with their Uncle Roy, returning with more clothes than they had had for some time. Mary had two pairs of shoes, one pair for every day and one for better wear, three new dresses, a new hat, new hair ribbons, and material to make herself some new undergarments. What pleased Mary most was a dress of soft, silky material, ready to wear. Otis was also supplied with clothes, and both children were delighted. Otis would run his fingers over the different garments that Roy had bought for him and then thank him again and again.

Myra was too indignant to speak to any of them when they returned home and refused to notice Roy when he took his departure the next day. Poor Mary had to suffer for the trip which she had to town, for Myra made life almost unbearable for her! Until this time she had not resented Otis so much, for although she did not like him, his misfortune called forth all the good that was in her, and she had sympathy for him. Now her rage must be spent, and she gave him part of it. She refused them the privilege of eating at the table with the rest of the family, giving them tin plates from which to eat their food and tin cans from which to drink. Her own children received the best, and then if there was anything left, Otis and Mary could have it if they chose.

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The material which Roy bought for Mary was left lying in the dresser drawer for weeks, because Myra refused Mary the privilege of making it, as she always had something else for her to do. But again Dan came in as the head of the family, for Aunt Millie asked that Mary and Otis might visit her, and Dan inquired of Mary if she had made her dresses. When informed that she had not and the reason of it there was another scene in the Dennison home, and Mary began to prepare one dress by cutting into the goods. Myra then denied her the privilege of using the sewing machine, and she stitched her dress with her fingers and a needle, but as she was very neat it looked very well. Mary had sewed since a small child, for whenever she would get a doll she felt that she must have a good wardrobe for it. Every little scrap of goods large enough for use was made up into some garment for her doll. Then when there were others in the family with dolls, she kept them well supplied with dresses. Myra was delighted with this for it kept her from being troubled with making doll garments, and Mary delighted in doing it. In this way she became a neat little seamstress and was soon making garments for herself and for the children and then for Myra also.

When Mary had finished her dress she viewed it with pride, and as she had the dress ready for wear that Uncle Roy had bought her, she thought the two of them would be all right for the time that she would be with Aunt Millie. But when she went to get her dress, the one of which she had been so proud and had tried it on again and again in the secrecy of her own room, she found it covered with axle grease. It was completely ruined, and she could not wear it at all. There was another scene in the Dennison home, and Mary and Otis went to visit their aunt, although Myra did everything she could to keep them at home.

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Mary wore the dress that she had made, and when her aunt saw it she exclaimed at the neatness of it but said, "Why, Mary, dear, why did you not make it with the machine? Your mother has a machine that stitches nicely, and why did you not use it?"

Upon being informed as to the reason, she then had Mary to rip the dress apart and stitch it on her machine, but when Mary returned home after Myra saw what had been done she again ripped the dress apart and Mary had to put it together again, stitching it with a needle.

How unbearable life was becoming, yet Dan never took his place in the home as he should until aroused beyond further endurance and then there would always be a scene! So Mary kept many things from him for fear of such, for after a scene in the home Myra would usually avenge herself on the children.

But there were some bright spots in her life, for after Roy joined the navy, he never failed to write to his little "Peachy" girl. There came letters to her from Panama, Cuba, South America, Hawaii, and the Philippines. Many times he would send them some curios from different places and often money so that Mary no longer had to clothe herself in Myra's old dresses. She delighted also in answering Roy's letters, but her heart was starving for the love of a tender, sympathetic, understanding parent. Aunt Millie took special interest in her, and their talks together helped Mary to develop into a girl with bright and noble ideals.

Chapter X

Roy Harmon's letters, his pictures, and curios that he sent to Mary had no incentive to make things better for her in her stepmother's home. Instead things grew worse and worse until at the age of fourteen life was almost unbearable to her. Practically all the work of the home was left to her, but try as she might there was never anything done just right. Her stepmother never failed to humiliate her all she could if anyone chanced to be there. There were two more children in the home now—Henry, aged two, and a small baby girl, Rosa, just three months of age. As more children came into the home there was less room for those who were there, and so Mary was crowded out. At the rear of the kitchen was a little room used for storage. To get to the room one must go entirely to the rear of the house and enter from an outer door. Mary was pushed out to this room, and her bed was reduced to a straw bed on the floor. It was not an uncommon thing for her to awaken to find rain coming through the cracks, or the snow sifting through on her face. She had become a real Cinderella, for she did the work and had the poorest accommodations about the place. She knew she was not there because it was really necessary, for there was the front room which was always used as a spare room for company, and the bed was always dressed in snowy whiteness; but her stepmother would never hear to her occupying that bed at all. If Mary would ever mention the rain or the snow coming in through

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the cracks in her room her stepmother would say, "Well that is better than you deserve." When Mary said, "Why don't you put Caroline out there to sleep with me then?" Myra replied, "Caroline doesn't have to go out there to sleep, and I shall teach you how to speak to me like that." Mary suffered a severe whipping because of what Myra called her "impertinence."

Mary could not go to her father with anything, for he had become cross and sullen, never giving a kind word to any of the children nor to his wife, and seldom speaking when about the place. Many times days would pass without Mary hearing his voice. Often she was glad because it was nearly always raised to high pitch and that to find fault with something about the place. But through it all Mary could not forget the pleasant times they had had together and his devotion to her in her early childhood. She could not think that her father was altogether bad when she recalled pleasant memories of the past.

Winter had passed and time came to close the district school. After a short program given by the pupils in the school it was to be closed with an old-fashioned spelling bee. Caroline and Nancy had been attending school and were given a part in the program. As an invitation was given to all the parents to attend, Myra made preparation to go with the children—planning on Mary's remaining at home to care for the younger ones. Mary longed to attend that spelling bee, but she did not know how to arrange it that she might go, for she knew if she should mention the fact to her stepmother there would be no chance for her to get there at all. So the days went by and the evening came for the program and the spelling bee. They were all seated around the table when Myra said, "Dan, I want you to get cleaned up a little and go with me tonight to the schoolhouse."

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“Huh,” said Dan, “and what is that for?”

Upon being informed as to what was taking place he said, “And what about Mary? Can’t she go with you and help you with the children? I do not care to go at all, and do not mean to go, but I shall keep Elmer and Ellen, and I think that you and Mary can manage the rest of them.”

Here Myra flew into a rage, as she very often did, but Dan had become very obstinate and he said, “Very well then, if Mary doesn’t go none of the others need go either.”

So turning to Caroline and Nancy he said, “Do you hear what I said? You need not go to the schoolhouse this evening for your mother is not going and neither am I.”

There was another scene in the Dennison home in which Dan came out the victor, for Mary went to the spelling bee that night with Otis holding on to one arm and carrying baby Rose in the other arm. She was dressed in a garment made from one of her stepmother’s old dresses, and her shoes were laced with a calico string, but her heart sang because she was attending the spelling bee.

Miss Myers, the teacher, met them at the door and took Caroline and Nancy to their places among the other pupils. The Dennisons were not the first ones there, and more kept coming until the house was filled. You could see eager expectancy written on all their faces as proud parents came to hear their children do their part in the program. Lanterns and lamps here and there about the room furnished sufficient light and there was chattering all over the room. Miss Myers looked at her watch again and again and seemed to be very much agitated for the time had come when she meant to begin the program and still one boy was not there. At the

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very last minute here he came, all bundled up and with a flannel cloth about his neck.

Mary sat near the door and heard Miss Myers say, "Oh, I have been so uneasy, Mrs. Peffers, for I feared Fred was not coming and I do not know what I should have done had he not come, for you know he has the main part in the program and it would have been ruined had he stayed away."

"Well, I was almost afraid to let him come," replied Mrs. Peffers, "for really he has been sick all day and has such a sore throat and is so hoarse. I do not know whether he can take his part or not, but he says he means to go through with it. I know the boy has fever, although he will not admit it. I am afraid the night air will not do him any good, but maybe it will not make him any worse for I have him wrapped up extra good, and have a piece of flannel about his neck. I told him that he might remove that while he is doing his part in the program." Miss Myers then led Mrs. Peffers to a seat near the front. The program began with the children all taking their places and doing their part. Caroline's and Nancy's names were called, and they each gave a recitation. Mary's heart beat a rat-a-tat in her bosom as they each delivered the recitation that she had taken so much pains to help them commit to memory, and as they did their part without any blunder she felt that she had been rewarded for all her efforts. How cute they looked in their new dresses and hair ribbons; dresses that Mary had made for them! Mary felt proud of them as she listened to them speak their pieces that night before that houseful of people.

The little ones were first on the program and then came the older pupils with a little play, "The Old Schoolmaster," in which Fred Peffers took the part of the old schoolmaster. He came before his pupils in frock tail coat, whiskers, and spectacles with a rod in

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hand which he frequently used on some mischievous boy. The audience roared with laughter at some of the antics among the mischievous boys when the schoolmaster's back was turned, and at some of the ridiculous things which he tried to teach them. The play ended with the schoolmaster's taking a nap in his chair and a boy loosing a bee which he had in a bottle, so that it made its escape up the schoolmaster's trouser leg just as Miss Sally, an old maid, came to visit the school. The curtain was drawn as the schoolmaster awoke and tried to get rid of the troublesome bee.

This ended the program, and there was an intermission of fifteen minutes. Then they were again called to order for an old-fashioned spelling bee in which Miss Myers asked that all take part. Henry and Rose were both asleep, lying on top of desks, and when all were called to take part Myra stood with the other mothers in the district. When Mary saw her leave the baby, she too left Henry lying on the desk where she had been sitting and took her place with the others around the wall. When all arrangements had been made the spelling began with Miss Myers pronouncing the words. Only one trial was given at a word, and if it was misspelled, it was passed on to the next one and the one who missed took his seat. Miss Myers took the old red-backed speller and opened it at the front, pronouncing first words of only one syllable. The first round around the wall several took their seats, for some of the older ones missed some simple word. Several times more around and so many had taken their seats that Mary was now standing beside her stepmother and therefore spelling against her.

“Audacious,” pronounced Miss Myers. It was now Myra's turn to spell, and all could see that she was very uncertain about the word. She stood haltingly as Miss Myers again pronounced the word and then spelled in a questioning way, “a-u-d-a-s-h-u-s.”

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Miss Myers smilingly said, "Next." It was not any question with Mary as to how it was spelled, for she could see it in her own mind on page eighty-three of the speller on the left side of the book in the third column of spelling, and so she spelled it unhesitatingly, "a-u-d-a-c-i-o-u-s." Miss Myers said, "Correct," while Myra took her place with the others who had missed their words, but her face was scarlet and her eyes flashed fire. She felt humiliated in being out spelled by her stepdaughter. But Miss Myers kept pronouncing words and those around the wall kept spelling until there were only two left standing, and they were Mary and Frank Fletcher, the latter a cousin of Myra's. Five minutes passed, and the two were still standing, each spelling with a positiveness which convinced their listeners that they knew the words. Miss Myers then turned to the back of the old speller to find some more difficult words, when off the desk rolled Henry, landing in the seat below and letting out a frightened scream.

Myra rose to her feet and in a sharp tone of voice said, "Mary, I think you have stood there long enough; if you had been there with your little brother where you belong he would not have rolled off the desk. Go on now and take care of him."

Mrs. Peffers had already lifted him in her arms and silenced him, so that he lay back in her arms and went to sleep again. She said, "Let her alone, and I shall see after him." So Mary kept her place beside Frank, spelling her words positively. Frank stumbled over some of his words uncertainly, but Mary caught her words and from the first letter to the last letter there was not an uncertain action about her. She knew them, knew just where they appeared on the page in the old speller, and could see them in her mind as Miss Myers pronounced them to her.

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Another leaf was turned; and Miss Myers then began to pronounce words taken from the French language and used in the English language. Several words were pronounced, each taking their turn in spelling, and then came the word "rendezvous" to Frank. He stood hesitatingly for some time before trying to spell. When Miss Myers pronounced it for him the second time he began in an uncertain manner, "r-e-n-d-a-v-o-u," and as Miss Myers said, "Next," Mary caught the word and spelled positively, "r-e-n-d-e-z-v-o-u-s," pronouncing the word also. At Miss Myers' "correct" the old school-house rang with cheers. It did not take a personal acquaintance with Myra to convince one that she was angry because of the turn of events that evening, for her face bore the appearance of an approaching storm. Just as soon as they could get away at the close of the night's entertainment they were gone and poor Mary had to bear the sharpness of her tongue all the way home. But as Otis walked by her side, holding to her arm, he whispered to her, "I never was so tickled in all my life as I was when you beat spelling, and I know Papa will be, too. But didn't it make Mother mad when you beat her?"

Mary was indeed proud that she had carried off the honors of being the best speller there that evening. Many were surprised because no one thought of Mary being anything else than a slave in the Dennison home, and as she had not been to school since nine years of age this was truly a surprise to all. Dan was delighted when the news was broken to him the next morning at the breakfast table, and when told that Mary spelled the word that his wife had missed he burst into a loud, "Ha! ha!" which opened the way for another scene in the Dennison home on which we shall draw the curtain.

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Two days after the close of school the news was circulated over the community that the Peffers' children had measles and that Frank had them the evening of the spelling bee at the schoolhouse, so that he exposed all the children in the community. True enough, in a short time those children who had not had measles came down with them, and in many homes some of the older people. Caroline and Nancy came down with them first in the Dennison home; then Ellen and Otis; but Mary had not yet taken them. Ellen was quite ill of them, but the other children were only confined to their beds a few days. Poor Mary had much to do, and then when she had finished her work at night, she would pile on her straw bed in the lean-to for a night's rest.

Three weeks had passed and the two little ones in the Dennison home took measles; then Elmer and Mary. It was now the last week in April and a cool rain was falling, but Mary lay on her straw bed in the old lean-to off the kitchen. There had been another scene in the home. Dan was going about in one of his sullen moods; and Mary had been sick for two days before he inquired as to why she was not about the place. About this time Otis stole up to him and said, "Papa, Mary is awful sick; she won't talk to me at all, and her bed covers are as wet as can be."

"Well, where is she?" inquired Dan. Otis led him to the little storeroom, and there he saw his eldest daughter on her straw bed, damp from the rain that had come through the cracks in the wall. He saw she was quite ill and that something must be done. When he informed Myra of her condition, she said, "Well, she is your young one, not mine, and if you want anything done for her do it."

Dan was not slow in doing something, for he immediately went to the spare room and with the aid of Caroline soon had the bed ready for Mary, only to be opposed by Myra, who declared she

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should not be placed in the best room they had. She said her children got over the measles without having the best there was in the house, and she meant to see to it that Mary did, too. This brought forth another scene in the Dennison home, but Dan came out the victor, for, taking Mary in his arms, he carried her to the front bedroom where he laid her on the best bed in the house, and where she lay for many days hovering between life and death. Pneumonia set in, and Mary was a very sick girl. Aunt Millie came to Dan's aid in caring for her, and the two of them nursed her back to health again. It was by the bedside of his eldest daughter that Dan Dennison came to himself and found what Mary really meant to him. Over and over he would chide himself for his neglect of her. Many times while she raved in delirium, he would sit by her bedside weeping and cry out, "O Elsie, Elsie; I have been so neglectful of yours and mine. I have forfeited the right of being called a father, for I have not been one." And one night as he and his sister watched by her bedside, expecting the little spark of life to flee at any time, he fell upon his knees and cried out, "O God, if you will but spare her, I promise you to be a better father than I have ever been and never neglect her again." Her severe illness proved what she really meant to him. He knew that had she not been neglected and left to sleep in the open when ill of measles the other affliction would not have come on her. But he was untiring in his attention to her and in his care of her. After several days of doubtful watching, Mary began to amend. When she did recover the front bedroom was known as Mary's room, and she no longer had to go to the old lean-to off the kitchen.

Chapter XI

Another year has passed, and there is a great hubbub in the Denison home for Mary received a letter from Uncle Roy, mailed in the Philippines, stating that he was soon sailing for the United States and that his time had expired in the navy, that he did not mean to reenlist, and so it would not be long until he would come to see his little "Peachy girl." A few days after receiving this letter, another one came from San Francisco stating he was in the States expecting to get his discharge in a few days, and he would then come to see them. So they were daily in a state of expectancy, for they did not know just when he would walk in. But days passed, and then weeks, and then months, before he came, for when entering the States he obtained employment which kept him close so that he could not get away often, and so Mary contented herself with his letters, although her disappointment was very great.

But Mary's life was not so hard, for there were many bright spots in it. Dan was indeed a changed man and very kind and tender to Mary. This only enraged Myra all the more, and often she told Dan he cared for no one but Mary, and Mary surely did not escape her sharp tongue. Dan did indeed care for Mary, and his tenderness toward her now was meant to be doubled so that he might in some way atone for the neglect of bygone years. She no longer had to dress in cast-off clothing, for when the other children

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got new dresses there was always one or more new ones for Mary. As she was neat about sewing, her clothes always looked nice, and she was developing into a beautiful young lady. After her illness, she lost all her hair, and now it hung in a mass of curls about her shoulders. Dan would often run his hands through her hair and say, "My old curly-head," proud of the fact that her hair hung in curls. It had been dark before her illness, but now was a glossy black. Otis would often run his blind fingers across her head and say, "Such pretty, pretty curls."

Such attentions to Mary only angered her stepmother all the more, and she resented it with all the power there was in her, threatening many times to wait until she caught Mary asleep and cut the last one of them off close to her head. But she did not get this opportunity, and, as she was so often cruel to extreme with Mary and Otis, doing things that were so unnecessary, Dan held a conference with Mary one day which brought desired results.

In the Dennison's community, the women often came together to quilt, and Myra invited a number of her neighbors to her place for a quilting. They were about twelve in number, and they came in the morning, remaining to dinner. Myra had been busy with the women about the quilt, leaving Mary to see to the cooking of the dinner. Mary was stirring up some dough when Myra came to the kitchen to get a saucer to make some round markings on the quilt, and when opening the cabinet door to get the saucer, she knocked the bowl containing the dough off, and it landed bottom side up on the floor. She flew into a rage and began to heap abuses on Mary for letting the bowl sit there. Mary went about cleaning up the mess that was made on the floor, and Myra returned to the room where the women were, telling what a time she had with Mary and

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how careless she was, stating that Mary had been so awkward and knocked a bowl of dough off on the floor.

Mary heard her through the open door and all the resentment of her soul went out against her stepmother, and, rising, she went into the room and confronted Myra, saying, "Now, Mother, you know that is not true at all, for you know that you upset that bowl yourself."

Here Myra turned toward her and with her voice pitched high in anger said, "I'll teach you to dispute my word like that," and, raising her hand, tried to strike Mary on the face, but Mary was not there as she dodged the blow, and when she straightened herself, she struck Myra with her open hand across the mouth. Those present stared open-mouthed as they saw these two return blow for blow. Mary was quicker than Myra, and so dodged many of her blows. Soon Myra sank into a chair and told Mary to behave herself. Mary was so angry she could not control herself and there before those women told Myra of the past, of the threats made, of the many brutal beatings she had given her, and of putting her out in the lean-to to sleep and trying to make her stay there when she had measles. No one present interfered, and so Mary was left to have her say. She took advantage of the opportunity. She told her stepmother that her father had told her to do this very thing the next time she tried to punish her unjustly, and she did it and concluded by saying, as she pointed her finger in Myra's face, "And I never expect to take another beating from you, for from now on the beatings will go the other way." As this was the first time that Mary had ever done such, Myra sat dumbfounded, and then tried to silence her. After some time Mary became quiet, and then, returning to the kitchen, completed the dinner.

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When Myra related the incident of the day to Dan, there was another scene in the Dennison home, as he informed her that he had instructed Mary to do the very thing she had done that day. Needless to say she was never compelled to take any more abuse from her stepmother, but a bitterness sprang up in Myra's heart against Mary which ripened into hatred, and from that time on Mary made Myra's life miserable. Many times Myra was tempted to drive her from home, but she was needed badly for the work which she did and then she knew also that Dan would interfere, and she also knew that she now was being paid back and in good measure for some things she had done in the past. She was beginning to reap some things she had sown.

Summer approached with its heat and scorching winds, and everybody busy on the farm. Dan had harvested and threshed his wheat and oats and finished his last piece of corn. Mary had been very busy that year, for she had been a helper in the field. She was with her father in the preparation of the ground and then in the planting of the seed and also in the harvesting of the grain. Caroline was now getting big enough to assist her mother in the house, but Myra did not find the willing helper in her that she had found in Mary. Much as Mary assisted in the field she also did what she could in the house, but regardless of what she did or what she did not do, she was unmolested by her stepmother.

One evening, the last week in August, as the Dennison family sat down to their evening's meal, a livery rig stopped at their front gate, a man and woman alighted, a couple of hand grips were set out of the rig, and the driver turned about in the road and headed his horses toward town. These two opened the gate and started up the walk. They did not recognize either of them until they were near the house, and Mary ran through the room calling out, "It's

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Uncle Roy; it's Uncle Roy." Soon Roy was again holding his little "Peachy girl" in his arms. He then presented the lady with him as her Aunt Ethel, and as Mary felt her warm handclasp and the loving caress on her cheek, her heart went out to her, and she in turn loved the curly-haired niece of her husband. Dan and Myra received them cordially, and all noticed the tears that fell from her eyes as Aunt Ethel felt the blind fingers of Otis pass over her face, as he tried to "see" his new Aunty. A pleasant evening was spent together, and before the Dennison family retired for the evening, Ethel had found a warm place in each of their hearts.

Roy and his wife had not been with the Dennisons very long until Dan found the object of their visit. Roy had seen how Mary's education had been neglected, and he asked that he might take her and Otis and educate them. He approached Dan the next day after his arrival, and was asked that he might consider it for awhile. At the end of the third day he told him, and then the children were consulted as to their desire. When Mary was informed as to the desire of her uncle, she fell on her Aunt Ethel's neck and wept tears of joy, for the desire of her heart was now to be realized, and she could go to school at last. Otis, too, was delighted beyond words, for he was to be sent to a school for the blind in the same city where Uncle Roy lived. The next few days were spent in making preparation, with Myra moody and sullen. But she could say nothing and did not until the morning of their departure, when there was another scene in the Dennison home which made Uncle Roy more determined than ever to care for his sister's children.

During the preparation for the children to take their departure, Ethel marveled at the deftness of Mary's fingers, and her neat sewing, and she would sit in admiration of the girl as she sat at the sewing machine or bent over the table either sewing or preparing

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some garment to sew. Uncle Roy would often come about her and, running his hands through her hair, would say, "My curly-headed, 'Peachy girl.'" Dan went with them to the train, and, as he told his children good-bye, he broke down. Gathering them both in his arms, he sobbed like a child. He knew that he would not see them again for many days and possibly never, and although he had not done as some would think that he should have done, he loved the children of his young wife. It was hard to part with them although he knew it was all for the best for both him and them.

Otis and Mary enjoyed the trip greatly, as it had been some time since either had taken a trip on the train. Mary could remember when she had been on a train, but Otis was too small to remember, and this trip was an enjoyable one for him. He would move his sightless fingers over the cushions, feeling of the soft plush, and then over the window of the coach, trying to see what kind of place it was. For many hours they were on the train, and then when they arrived in the city where they were to live, they stared about them open-mouthed. Neither had ever seen a street car, and Otis was attracted by the sound and immediately began all sorts of questions about it. They took a car to their home and again Otis' fingers helped him to see what he was riding on.

Upon entering their new home, Mary stared in amazement, for there stood an upright piano, the first she had ever seen. When Aunt Ethel seated herself on the stool and began to run her fingers over the keys and bring out beautiful music, Mary looked on top of it, around the back of it, and then, getting on her hands and knees, tried to peep under it to see where the music was coming from. To others this would have been very amusing, but tears of sadness rolled over Uncle Roy's cheeks as he thought of the neglected

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children who were so dear to him. He meant to do all that he could that others could see his “Peachy girl” as he saw her.

Chapter XII

Roy Harmon's wife was a very pious woman, giving more heed to her religious duties than to anything else, for she made God first in her life. When Roy came to the city, he boarded with Ethel's mother and was attracted to her because of her godly character. Roy had not been as devoted to his God as he should have been, and he soon saw his shortcomings in this respect. After he renewed his covenant with his Lord, his interests became the same as Ethel's and soon a warm friendship sprang up between them which terminated in marriage. Before marriage, Roy unburdened his heart to her concerning his sister's children. It was mutually agreed upon that when they had a home of their own they would take these two children to it and do their best to educate them. Now these plans were being carried out. Roy had a good position with good wages, and as soon as they were married he took his bride to a home he had furnished for her. Each knew how to economize. In a few months they began to see their way clear to pay off the indebtedness on their little place; so they began to consider Roy's long cherished plans to do something for his only sister's children.

Mary and Otis were in their uncle's home now, and it seemed as if they were in another world. Everything was strange to them. There was no soft grass on which to tread, but instead the hard

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pavements along the street. There was no gazing away over a wide expanse of country fields and lanes, for their new home was surrounded with other buildings and other homes.

The home seemed strange to them also, for it differed much from their former one. In this home God was revered in every way. At each meal grace was offered before eating. Morning and evening the Bible was opened and a chapter was read. Then, kneeling before God, Uncle Roy or Aunt Ethel would offer thanks unto him and invoke his care and blessings. The children went with their Aunt and Uncle regularly to Sunday school and church services. Surrounded by such environment, an impression was soon made upon them and a change wrought in them. Aunt Ethel never tired of trying to instruct them for she saw material there that could be polished and made to shine for good. The task was a difficult one, but the real missionary spirit within her gave her patience to wait and overlook many things so that she might help the poor, neglected children that meant so much to her husband.

One evening after attending services Mary returned to her uncle's home. All could see she was very much troubled about something as truly she was, for she had listened attentively to the message delivered that evening. The minister's subject was "The New Birth." He not only laid down the principles of the new birth, but the essentials as well, stating that one could not hope to see God or see those whom God had called away from this world unless he had been a recipient of God's Spirit, been made a child of God, made a new creature in Christ, been born again.

As he mentioned the necessity of being born again that we may meet those whom God has called away from us, the face of little baby Margaret came before Mary. She saw her again as she had seen her so many times, smile up into her face, and she

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remembered the words of the minister spoken at the time of the funeral, "You cannot bring her back, but you can go to her." She also remembered the decision made that someday she would go to her. She remembered the deepening of that decision when Grandma Harmon was taken away from them. Mary was very quiet as they walked home from services and after reaching home. She listened very attentively as Uncle Roy read again from God's Word. As they knelt for prayer something stole over her as Aunt Ethel began to pray. Bursting into tears, she cried out, "Oh, I want to be born again, but what must I do?"

It was not an easy matter to instruct the penitent child. Ethel did her best. Roy agreed in prayer with her. They tarried until past the midnight hour, praying to God to enlighten the child and inspire faith within her soul. In the early hours of the morning, light broke through the darkness and Mary knew that she had been born again. She rejoiced that she now had the assurance of meeting baby Margaret and Grandma Harmon.

A new task now opened for Aunt Ethel. She had to instruct Mary in the things of the Lord, and that in an understandable way. Mary was eager to learn and asked many questions. In this way her aunt got much truth to her. To Mary this new experience was unexplainable for again it seemed that she had been transported to a new world. She tried to do everything that she thought might be required of her to do and took her place in the home with the family in their daily worship. Sometimes she would only read some Scripture and then again her voice would be lifted in prayer. She really hungered for more and more of the Lord's richness in her heart. In this her aunt was untiring in trying to teach her.

Mary had been enjoying this new experience for a few weeks when she came to her aunt and said, "Aunt Ethel, I am very much

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bothered about something. I do not know just what to do about it. You know I read this morning from the Bible, 'Love your enemies. Do good to them that hate you. Pray for them that spitefully use you and persecute you,' and I have never thought to pray for Mother yet and I know she used me spitefully. I would like for you to tell me just what you think should be done." Mary then told many things that had taken place in the Dennison home even to the time of the combat between herself and her stepmother. Then Ethel had a good chance to get another lesson to Mary. At the close of that conversation, a letter was written to Myra Dennison bearing Mary's signature telling of the change that had come into her life and asking her forgiveness for what had been done. In closing the letter, Mary wrote, "Mother, I want you always to remember that I love you and I am doing just what the Bible says for me to do. Each day I am praying for you." If Mary could have seen her stepmother when she received this letter, she would have been convinced that she was not altogether bad. She buried her face in her apron and, seating herself in a rocking chair, wept like a child. Mary was taking the best route to open Myra's eyes to her own need. It was some weeks before Mary received a reply to her letter, and then came one with all the endearing words a mother could send to her own child. This made Mary rejoice and made her to appreciate the Lord more than ever. She consecrated her life to God, and the Holy Spirit so controlled her life that hers was one of constant victory. She needed this power to help her through the many difficulties which confronted her in her life at school. But whatever came before her, she could always see the goodness of God, and her sweet, Christian character made her a favorite with all who knew her.

Chapter XIII

The first day in the city's school was torturous for Mary. She had never attended school other than in the rural district. Everything was strange and everybody so different that she felt like rushing back to her uncle's house and remaining there. Her Aunt Ethel had gone with her the day before to register, but here she was alone and she did not know where to go nor what to do. A number of students passed her in the halls. Some only gave her a glance, while others made rude remarks. Some of them passing by would jeer at her and say to others, "Look; a regular hayseed," and these remarks would reach her ears.

She was ready to burst into tears when one of the teachers passed by her and, after conversing with her, led her to the assembly room. How lonesome and fearful she felt, and so out of place! She could not be ashamed of her clothing for she was as well dressed as any of them. Her uncle had been careful to see to that. But all the other students acted free and unassuming, while she felt cramped and awkward.

The first day passed by; the second was not so bad; and by the end of the week Mary had begun to see things differently. Although she was very awkward for awhile she adapted herself

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rapidly to surroundings and soon felt very much at home in the city schoolroom.

As she had left school when she was nine years old, she was far behind others of her age, and one great embarrassment was her being in a room with so many younger than herself. But she had a quick brain and went to work so that at the close of the first year of school she had advanced two grades.

Needless to say she was a favorite among all her teachers and all took a special interest in her. This made her schooling pleasant, although she met with many jeers and jestings on the part of the other pupils. At the close of her first term of school she enrolled among the students who attended the summer term and in this way was enabled to take a higher course at the opening of the fall term.

Otis was in school also. His uncle was well pleased with the progress he was making. But his schooling kept him away from home as he could not make the trip to and from school alone. So he remained in the school, having permission to be home every two weeks. At first Mary could scarcely pass the two weeks by, for since Otis' birth she had spent very few nights away from him and she missed him. But as her studies increased they occupied so much of her time that she had very little time left to think of Otis being gone. In a few weeks she could look forward to something good when he returned home, for Otis was also being educated in music and his fingers were becoming quite nimble as he swept them over the keyboard of the piano. He delighted in music, so made rapid progress. Mary took instruction also from Aunt Ethel. She could not make the progress Otis made although she soon could play the hymns they sang at church services. But Mary used her voice and practiced hard. She sang special songs at their church services and in their school assemblies that were greatly

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appreciated. Roy and Ethel would often look on these two children with all the pride of fond, devoted parents and thank God that they had taken the rough diamond and tried to polish it. The children were truly endeared to their hearts. All could see Roy had made more room than necessary in his heart for his curly-headed “Peachy girl.”



Four years passed since Mary and Otis came to live with their uncle and aunt in the city. Roy, Ethel, and Otis were sitting with many other relatives in the large assembly hall, facing a curtained platform. It was Mary’s graduation day, and she was to be valedictorian of her class. Behind that curtain somewhere was Roy’s “Peachy girl.” He leaned forward anxiously as the curtain arose. Yes, there she sat in the front row of seats, her white dress bringing out the blackness of the curls which played about her forehead and temples. She scanned the crowd with her dark eyes, as though searching for some familiar face, and as she caught the wave of her Aunt Ethel’s hand she nodded her head in recognition.

The orchestra played a lively number, as printed programs were distributed among the audience. As Roy scanned its pages he found what made his heart beat a rat-a-tat-tat in his bosom, for there was the name of the one so dear to him—Elsie’s daughter, the one who had crept into his heart when she was only a baby and who now occupied a place there almost equal to that of his companion. He had sacrificed many things. The task had been a difficult one. But as Mary arose before that large audience to render the valedictory address, Roy was delighted and all these things faded away, for the dream of many years’ standing was being realized.

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There were other renditions before Mary stepped before that large audience to deliver her oration, "Success, a Lure to Youth." From the first word to the closing one, Roy sat open-mouthed while tears streamed down his cheeks. "Peachy girl" had chosen a good topic. In opening her address she pictured the future before her hearers, as viewed by the eyes of youth, in such a way that those before her could feel the same longings and desires surging within their own bosoms. A feeling of pride and admiration swept over them as she illustrated her thought with the story of a boy handicapped in his youth, crippled, homeless, penniless, and destitute of what youth might deem necessary to make success. Through it all he followed on after that bright star of hope which ever shone before him, and through constant perseverance reached the success dreamed of in his early youth. Then followed the names of many prominent statesmen and financiers who overcame difficulties, lured on by the bright star, Hope, in making success. Then she paused.

All eyes were centered upon her. None could have recognized in her the awkward country girl, who four years before had entered their city school. She stood before them free and unassuming, seemingly as much at home as though sitting alone with her aunt and uncle in their own home. The audience waited, straining their ears to catch the conclusion of her oration. She stepped to one side gracefully and, leaning toward the audience, elevated her voice as she said, "But some will say there are many noble men and women of whom the world has never heard, and this may be true, but I want to say to you that true greatness of soul and of spirit, though it be clothed in tatters and rags, and nursed in direst poverty, cannot be thwarted in its purpose nor overcome in its determination."

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She lowered her voice as she continued, "In the little city of Bethlehem a baby was born in a stable, cradled in a manger and lulled to slumber by the lowing of the oxen and the bleating of the sheep." Then followed a description of the early life of the lowly Galilean, a carpenter's helper, a wanderer without any place to lay his head and no plot of ground which he could call his own or which might rest his body when it was carried from Golgotha's hill. "But did he make a success of life?" The question came ringing out over the audience, and many leaned forward to catch the next words. "I say again greatness, though it be clothed in direst poverty, cannot be thwarted nor overcome. His path lay across the pathway of kings and governors, but he could not be stopped. As we look at the innumerable host of earth's millions who, in catching a glimpse of Golgotha's hill, fall down and render homage unto the lowly man of Galilee, we are made to cry out, 'He succeeded.' " She then turned to her classmates and, motioning her hand to emphasize her statement, said, "We, too, can succeed, for when we are partakers of his goodness and clothed in his greatness that star of hope will lure us on. When we shall have passed from time, and eternity dawns before us, others will say of us as we now say of him, 'Theirs was a successful life.' "

Mary took her place again among her classmates on the platform while the audience applauded. Roy and Ethel sat still looking first one way and then another over the audience while a deafening roar filled the auditorium. Roy could scarcely wait for the conclusion of the program to get to his "Peachy girl," for she had surely carried off the honors of the day in the rendition of that oration.

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But the program was concluded, the diplomas were presented, and Mary was surrounded by her loved ones and many classmates. Friends also crowded around her to congratulate her on the rendition of her address. Among them was Edwin Wheeler, a young minister, who smilingly tendered his congratulations, presenting her with a book also. As Mary smiled into his face all could see there was a mutual friendliness between them.

Chapter XIV

Seven years have passed since Mary and Otis came to live with their Uncle Roy. These have been pleasant years for all of them for there has sprung up among them a love and an appreciation for one another which brings real happiness in any home.

After Mary's graduation she taught in the grade schools for a few terms, and in this way relieved her uncle of a heavy burden by helping to keep Otis in school. Both were delighted with the progress Otis made, for he had developed into a fine looking young man despite his misfortune. He was very congenial and was much sought after by the young folks because of his congeniality and carefree way. He was the entertainer at every social gathering, for his wit was above the average. He was also a real student, and his fingers brought much knowledge to him from the different books he read. But Otis was not appreciated in his fullness until seated at the piano, for he had mastered that instrument and could bring music from it as few others could. He was also proficient on the harp and a teacher of both piano and harp. He became a composer of music also and in this way became self-supporting.

As no children came into the home of Roy and Ethel, Mary and Otis filled a place in their hearts equal to children of their own and their admiration was unbounded. It was a struggle for them to

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educate the children as they did. Many times they felt they would have to give it up, but always there was some way provided. One time he applied to Dan for help, but as he received no reply, he felt assured that the letter had never reached Dan's hands. He wrote his brother David only to receive a surly letter in reply, informing him that David also had a family and was under no obligation whatever to deprive his family of anything to assist Elsie's children. If he did he would not expect anything else than that the day would come when they would give him the "high hat" because of it. They had a father and if he wanted any help to polish up Elsie's children call upon their father. So there was no one to whom he could turn. So Roy and Ethel struggled on. As they looked at the two children grown and doing for themselves they felt rewarded for all the efforts put forth. Ethel was often heard to say, "We are proud of our children."

June arrived. Mary's school closed and she decided not to teach the following term. When the officials pressed her for a positive answer, she told them she meant to leave the city. Teacher and pupils wept as she said good-bye at the close of school. They had endeared themselves to her and she herself to them, and it was not easy to separate. She felt as she looked over her pupils that she had instructed them in a way that would make them better citizens by having come in close touch with her. She always held out before them the greatness of One who will endow all mankind with greatness and all knew that Mary's life was one filled with his graces. Many boys who had been very unruly had been won by her kindness. She always held before them their good qualities and gave them something good to see, thereby letting the good overcome the bad in them, and making them realize what there was in life. She moved among them in such a way as to convince them

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that she loved them and was vitally interested in them. None could be thrown in constant touch with her without feeling her Godly influence.

It was Wednesday evening. A large crowd had assembled in Park Avenue Church where the Harmons and Dennisons attend services. Ushers dressed in frock tail coats and white vests were seating the people here and there about the building. The room was filled with the scent of roses and other flowers artistically arranged about the building. Large potted ferns here and there among the flowers gave richness to the coloring and added to their beauty. Trailing vines were twined about the altar and over an arch directly in front.

A hush fell over the audience as Otis entered with his Aunt Ethel who led him to the piano. He seated himself as she took a seat near where she could reach him. Reverend Kelley entered through a rear door as Edwin Wheeler came down the aisle on the arm of his brother Charles and the three men met under the vine-covered arch. Ethel touched Otis' elbow and his fingers began to move over the keyboard of the piano. Notes of a wedding march floated out over the audience. Mary entered on the arm of her Uncle Roy, walking on the rose petals which had been scattered in the aisle by little Ruth Kelly, a daughter of the minister in charge. These two joined the three men at the altar, followed by two bridesmaids who were special friends of Mary. There was a brief pause. Ethel again touched Otis and the music changed. A soft, tinkling sound floated over the audience like the sound of distant bells or the rippling of water, dying away like the receding wind. He continued to play as the minister read the ceremony, soft, sweet music which, blending with the minister's voice, thrilled the listeners.

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“Who giveth this daughter in marriage?” said the minister. There was a pause as from the ends of Otis fingers came the sound of rippling waters. “I do,” said Uncle Roy as he placed Mary’s hand in the hand of Edwin Wheeler. He and Charles Wheeler stepped back from the altar as the sound of whispering winds through leafy branches was heard. This died away into nothingness as the minister continued to read the ceremony joining Mary and Edwin. As he pronounced them husband and wife, Ethel again touched Otis and as the sound of ringing bells was heard the bridal party turned from the altar and marched out.

“How beautiful!” exclaimed Mary’s friends as she turned that they could catch a glimpse of her face. Wreathed in smiles she walked out leaning on the arm of her husband, her bright eyes shining. A bridal veil had been artistically draped about her forehead, held in place with a wreath of orange blossoms. The curls which ever played about her forehead and temple had found their way from beneath it and could be seen about her face.

After the ceremony many gathered in the Harmon home to say good-bye to the young couple. They were going away to their new home in a distant city, where Edwin Wheeler was pastor of a congregation, to take up their new duties, each to be a helper of the other and the two to be real helpers to the flock they were to pastor.

Uncle David had been persuaded to attend Mary’s wedding. As he looked on while her many friends gathered about her tendering their congratulations, a sting of remorse and regret surged through his heart. He wished now that he could say he had had some part in making the noble young woman what she was. He returned to his own home a wiser and a better man, bearing a different feeling toward his brother than he had ever had before.

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He saw that unselfishness truly brings delightful reward, and he knew that Roy was enjoying real happiness of which he knew nothing.

Ten years have passed since Mary walked down the aisle on the arm of her uncle, meeting at the altar the young man whom she had selected to go through life with her, and these years have brought about many changes. In Mary's home is heard the prattle of childish voices. Two little girls and one little boy have made their appearance. First, Elsie May, then Mary Ethel, and then Daniel LeRoy. These three children have thrown about them all that make a home pleasant. Edwin and Mary are fond, loving parents, teaching their children of the God that means so much to both of them. Theirs is a happy home for love rules. Otis spends much of his time with Mary and her husband, although his home is with Uncle Roy. He delights to romp with Mary's children and they love their uncle as he loves them.

There is another inmate in Mary's home who requires much of her attention. Myra Dennison lies a helpless invalid, having been confined to her bed for a number of months. She has no other place to go but Mary would choose to have her remain for she delights in doing what she can to make her comfortable.

Shortly after Mary's wedding her father was injured by some piece of machinery while threshing which injury resulted in his death, leaving Myra with a house full of children to support. She did the best she could, but as they grew up they went out to do for themselves. Some of them married and had homes of their own. But when Myra's health failed so that she could not care for herself, none of them made room for her nor offered to help her in any way. It was then that she appealed to Mary, who made room for her and cared for her untiringly. Although there are impressions

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made on childish minds that can never be erased, Mary swept past memories aside as she looked at the sufferer before her and kindly ministered unto her needs. In her sufferings Mary pointed her to one who has promised to be a present help in every time of trouble. She felt rewarded as she saw the smile of hope spread over Myra's face. Shortly after, Myra passed into eternity, but Mary's kind, loving hands ministered to her until the last moment of her life. As her tears fell, none would think that she bore other than the sweetest memories for her who was gone. Her reverence and respect equaled that borne for an own mother.

As Roy looked on during this trial of Mary's life, he again thanked God that he had taken her into his own home and through God's help had polished the rough diamond until it was now shining with the real Christian graces. As he one time more gathered his little "Peachy girl" (as he still continued to call her) into his arms and began to talk of the past, she silenced him by saying, "I have too much to be thankful for now to think of dwelling on the past. The comfort which comes to me at this time well repays me."

"Yes," said Uncle Roy, "but you have done something which Mother's own children would not do. Caroline has a home as well as you, and you know she could have made room for her, but she would not do it."

Mary stood proudly erect before her uncle as she replied, "I know it, Uncle Roy. She could have given Mother a home and cared for her if she would have cared to. She refused to make room for her. But you must remember she is Caroline and I am Mary, just Mary."

